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THE FATES ARE LAUGHING

By the same author

LETTERS OF PONTIUS PILATE

The
FATES ARE LAUGHING

by
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Biographical Postscript by
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PART ONE



CHAPTER I

'Yes,' said the lady Aelia Memmia, 'I think it's certain now that Sejanus will be Emperor. My husband has gone to the Senate. He may be back at any moment with the news.'

The Roman ladies murmured sympathetically. There were a dozen of them chattering on a hot July morning in the year 31 of the Christian reckoning. They had come to call on Aelia Memmia and were sitting in a room that opened out of the hall in the house on the Esquiline Hill. They had been invited to look at the paintings on the walls which had just been completed. The painter was a fashionable Greek, Alexis, who had also done wall-paintings for the Emperor Tiberius, for his mother Livia, the widow of the Emperor Augustus, and for his favourite Sejanus, who was a cousin of Aelia and related also to the great Cornelian house to which her husband, Sextus Cornelius Flaccus, belonged. The paintings were white on a black background, each within a gaily coloured border, so that it looked like a picture in a frame. On three of the walls were scenes from country life. The first showed a boat on the sea with two girls, one clapping her hands and the other waving gaily to a woman with a child who was standing looking at them from the cliff above. On the second wall was shown a stream with an angler rooted on the bank, as though he had fished for days, intent and happy, with an empty basket by his side. On the third wall men were loading hay on a wagon while another played the pan-pipes and a girl danced. On the smaller fourth wall, where the door was, a little winged Love floated down through the air, holding out a chaplet towards a youth who sat dreaming on a flower-covered bank. Beneath the pictures, running all round the room, was a strip about four feet high from the floor. On it was painted a path meandering through fields, with figures walking along or reclining by it — a soldier, a student reading a book, mothers with children, an old

man on a donkey followed by a dog, a beggar playing the flute, and a poet, gay and graceful, declaiming his verses. So fresh! they said, so witty! So modern! Happy Aelia Memmia to be able to employ the famous artist who painted for the Emperor, and for Lucius Aelius Sejanus, the friend who, as they were now almost sure, would soon succeed to his power! They had accepted Aelia's invitation not merely to admire the pictures but in the hope of news. They thought that they might hear something fresh about the prospects of Sejanus, in whose fortunes Aelia and her family, and they themselves, might share.

Most of the ladies sat on stools, which were very like one another except that the legs were finished differently, the feet of one resembling lion's paws, of another crude faces, of another flowers. Aelia herself was a woman of about forty-five years, small in build and bony, in manner composed, with watchful eyes. She was an ambitious woman. Like all her kinsfolk she had watched the rise of Sejanus eagerly. The dynasty, for so it was, of Julius Caesar, Augustus and Tiberius was openly withering away. Natural death or wounds, murder or vice was thinning out the claimants. Sejanus might succeed to power. Sejanus almost must succeed to power. Now and then the Emperor snubbed him, but that, it might be thought, meant nothing; the old man, who was over seventy, was becoming more and more capricious; he was growing eccentric; he was only warning Sejanus not to be over-confident. Allowances must be made. All would be well. Word must come soon that Sejanus was assured of the succession. It might come any day. It might come that morning.

Aelia sat in a chair with a high back as did another, a privileged member of the party. This was Lollia Claudia, an impressive woman, slightly older than Aelia. She was an old school friend and distantly connected. She was round, handsome, hearty, a little malicious. Her face was well known among the Roman nobility. It was perfectly smooth, without lines or wrinkles. People whispered that she had a miraculous balsam given her by a Cappadocian priest whom, more than his god, she had cultivated. In reality this smooth, unchanging face was the result of intelligent industry. There was no beauty expert in Rome who knew more than Lollia about the treatment of the face, none who could more persuasively aid Nature with rouge or dark-blue

eyelash pigment. Her mouth was large, her voice husky. When she grinned and the corners of her mouth went back towards her ears and the croak in her throat was heard, it was evident why her acquaintances, whether in affection or in fear, called her 'The Wolf'. One of her enemies had said she was 'a croaking hag', but this was thought to be excusable in an exquisite Greek courtesan, from whom, almost as angry as she was astonished, the elderly Lollia had taken a young lover: another instance, as the Greek virtuously declared, of the rich amateur filching the livelihood of a hardworking professional woman.

Lollia was rich. The fortunes of the family had been well laid by her grandfather who, in the later days of the Republic, had egged on Asiatic princelings to fight each other and had then, when Rome intervened to crush them, bought their subjects as slaves. Her father had been hampered by Augustus's prejudice, which Tiberius maintained, against misrule in the provinces. The establishment of the Roman peace had steadily reduced the enterprise of the family until at last its members could only buy slaves in the cheapest market and sell them in the dearest — a decline from the larger brigandage which, as involving mere trade, they left to their freedmen, while not disdaining the profits. The freedmen did good business for them. They hired the slaves out to rich men who were building houses or to municipalities for public works or to the owners of great estates.

Lollia herself had been three time married and twice divorced. She had had, so she said, the bad luck to have for her third husband a man who was fond of her but jealous. She found marital restrictions irksome even when she did not observe them and she welcomed the liberty given by her last husband's death. Childless and rich, she was courted by all ages, from striplings to old men, and by all callings, from senators and knights to actors and gladiators, all of whom hoped to be rewarded for their attentions, if not during her life, in her will when she was dead.

The ladies were eating and drinking while they talked. On a table at one end of the room were bowls of wine, both warm and cold, decorated with scenes from the lives of the gods, together with fruit, pastries and dishes full of pleasant meats: pieces of chicken breasts, rolls of ham and little sausages. There were lettuce leaves and barley water for those of simpler tastes or

frailer health. Young slave girls in saffron tunics carried the food and drink to the guests. Other slaves bore pitchers of water and bowls and, on being called, poured the water over the guests' hands, which others of them dried.

Aelia Memmia had said 'I think it's certain now' almost every time that a new guest arrived, settled down and questioned her on the subject of the day. She was saying it now to Valeria, a pretty young woman, who had brought her son Quintus, about seven years old. His charming, innocent face endeared him to the ladies as much as his sweet, untutored manner. They said he would break hearts, this little Adonis, when he grew up, or that he was as lovely as Narcissus or Hylas, whom the nymphs desired. They fondled him jealously, saying how enviable among women was his mother, how thoughtful as well as pretty was the boy himself. Later, Aelia pressed him to go on eating, but his mother said that he had had enough, adding that, unlike most children, he himself knew when to stop. Aelia protested that her cakes would never harm him. They were made by a slave who had once cooked for the head priest in the temple of Diana at Ephesus — what better test of good cooking could there be? — and she did not think there was his like in Rome. So they fell to talking of cooks and cooking, and the youngest of the guests, a girl named Metella, said, 'I get the next best cakes at a little shop I go to in the Suburra.'

'You don't really mean,' said Aelia, 'that you go yourself to such a street to shop.'

'I do.'

'But, my dear,' protested the hostess, 'what low company!'

'I know,' said Metella, 'but then I like low company.'

Metella was about eighteen years old, daughter of the Senator Publius Antonius Celer, but not yet betrothed. She was of middle height, quick and graceful in her movements. She was neither handsome nor beautiful, yet most people thought her good-looking. They were attracted by her because her look was frank, her smile charming, and her dark eyes vividly expressive of sincerity.

'But you don't understand, my dear Aelia,' broke in Lollia, with a hoarse chuckle. 'The shop is kept by a country cousin of Lucius Paetus. It is not low company that takes Metella there,

but loyalty to Lucius.' She smiled slyly at the company. 'Isn't that so, Metella?'

Aelia, without smiling, looked at Metella. She knew that Lucius Paetus wanted to marry Metella, but so did her son Aulus and, if he did, she intended that he should have what he wanted. She thought it a breach of the right order of things if Lucius should stand in his way. Lucius, after all, though intelligent, industrious and likeable, with a face that people called interesting but not good-looking, was of an undistinguished family. Also, he had undistinguished prospects compared with her son, who belonged to one famous house, was connected with almost all the houses equal to his own, and was gifted enough, she was sure, to become almost anything in the State short of Caesar's own eminence. Lucius's father, Plotius, was the son of a farmer at Arpinum, in the Latin country. He had done well in the army. He had fought in half a dozen campaigns, mostly in Germany, had been thrice wounded and at an early age had become the senior centurion of his legion. He had gained that honour twenty-two years before at the time when the German chief Arminius and his tribesmen tricked, routed and massacred three legions under Varus. Excited by that triumph the Germans had fallen on and destroyed every Roman garrison east of the Rhine except one; that this one defended itself and finally broke through the enemy and got away was largely due to Plotius. When, retiring from legionary service, he returned to Rome, he had been made commander of one of the cohorts of the police under the Prefect of the City. Efficient here also, he had before long transferred to the Praetorian Guard. He was now tribune of a cohort, a solid but not influential position. His service had, however, brought him friends who had enough influence to secure his admission into the order of Knights and to get his son into the Emperor's service. Lucius held a junior post in the secretariat which was concerned with Syria.

'Well,' said Metella, 'Lucius's cousin came from Reate in the Sabine country and set up shop in Rome. He couldn't make farming pay. At first he had only Lucius to help him. He and his wife work hard and are doing better now. I go there partly to please Lucius and partly because I like the cousin, his wife and their children.'

'And very proper too!' said Lollia. 'Love me, love my cousin and his cakes. As a matter of fact, they're good cakes. I've had some at Metella's. You must take me to that shop someday, Metella. I've not been in the Suburra for ages and really we ought to know how our fellow-Romans live, though we seem to get on quite well without the knowledge. My belief is that we ought to do all we can for the common people provided that we don't have to mix with them, because really the way in which they talk, laugh and smell is unbearable. Not but that the men are very useful for the army.'

Aelia had listened with a growing frown, but if she intended to say anything more she had no chance. There was a sudden cry of pain, a crash and a tinkle of broken glass. One of the slaves, a girl named Iris, had dropped a tray on which she was carrying a glass of hot wine. At the moment when she made the exclamation she had turned suddenly towards the young Quintus, who was now standing beside his mother with an abstracted air. The girl was contemplating the broken glass and some dark stains on Metella's cloak with dismay, while at the same time she clutched her left forearm with her right hand. She bent her head and her mouth trembled as she awaited the storm. She was a Jewess of about sixteen years old, tall and handsome, with a proud bearing and an obstinate mouth.

'Clumsy girl!' said her mistress. She pointed to the fragments. 'Pick them up and go. You will be punished. This is the second time. I should have thought that you had learnt a lesson.'

'He hurt my arm,' said the girl, looking at Quintus. 'He pinched it as I was going by.' She was not defiant but was not cowed. She said calmly as if explaining, 'My arm was hurt already.'

'It's true, Aelia Memmia.' Metella had sat forward, waiting to break in. 'I saw Quintus putting out his hand towards her and then dodging away. You can't punish the girl.'

Lollia intervened. 'It's the little wretch that should be punished. He should be well beaten. "Spare the rod and spoil the child", as Julius Caesar learned.'

'What on earth has Julius Caesar to do with it?' asked Metella.

'He spared the rod and the spoiled children murdered him,' replied Lollia. 'He was always forgiving people. His great-nephew Octavius executed them and their friends too, and

what happened to him? He died pleasantly and became Divine Augustus.'

'But, Lollia,' protested the mother, 'you're wrong. My husband says you teach a child nothing by beating him except to be afraid and therefore to deceive. He says you must appeal to the child's better nature.'

'You can't appeal to what isn't there,' replied Lollia. 'I would appeal to the place he sits on and, as soon as he deceived me, appeal again twice as hard.'

'But it would do no good, that's the point. My husband says that the boy would only behave well out of fear and then, when he wasn't afraid, he would be very bad.'

'I don't know whether he's afraid or not,' retorted Lollia, 'but he couldn't be worse.'

'Well,' Valeria insisted, 'my husband and I are satisfied that we're doing the right thing. Quintus used to be most self-willed. He sometimes really hurt the slaves. He used to stab them with the spears belonging to his toy soldiers. Everybody told us that we ought to punish him, but we didn't feel that we could do that. Then we heard of Artemidora, the wonderful teacher from Persepolis. She started a school in Rome here with about fifteen boys and girls. She has the most modern ideas. It's only for Romans, of course, and no one is taken whose father isn't a Senator. She holds that a child should be allowed to do exactly as he chooses and never be repressed until he reaches an age when his own reason will guide him aright.'

'Some don't reach that age,' said Lollia.

Valeria was indignant. 'It's an educational principle, Lollia Claudia. It settled all our difficulties. Quintus does what he likes, just as he did before, but now it's part of his education, so everyone is pleased.'

Quintus listened with a shy smile, holding his mother's arm affectionately. Meanwhile Metella had put her hand gently on Iris's arm. The girl shrank away, wincing, and Metella, leaning towards her, pushed back the sleeve of her tunic and was now regarding the bare forearm with horror. It was covered with weals and bruises; it had obviously been struck violently with a whip or cane; towards the elbow there were signs of blood showing on rags twisted round the limb.

Metella pointed with indignation to the wounds. 'Oh!' she said. 'Look, Aelia Memmia! What has been done to her?' The ladies looked at Metella with disapproval, except for Lollia, who was amused.

'She was disobedient,' said Aelia coldly, 'and she was punished. She is rebellious. The slave who flogged her was clumsy but it was largely her own fault. As it seems it is not her fault to-day, there is nothing more to be said. But you had better take the girl with you, Metella, to another room and see if she can get the stains out of your cloak at once.' Then, catching sight of Quintus, she said, 'But what's the boy doing now?' He had fallen on to his hands and knees and was crawling towards each of the ladies in turn, wagging his head to and fro and uttering savage growls. 'Wild beast eating prisoners in the amphitheatre, I should guess,' said Lollia. 'Isn't it, Valeria?'

'Well,' said the mother, 'he's never seen it, of course, but he knows the idea. They play it at his school. It's supposed to develop character, and character is so important, isn't it? Learning doesn't matter at his age but character is everything. My husband says you can't begin too early training it.'

In another room, while Iris was trying to take the stains out of the cloak, Metella looked again at her arm and asked for what she had been flogged. The girl was at first unwilling to say, not knowing whether a friend was talking to her or someone who would perhaps afterwards chatter to the mistress. Metella soon removed her doubts. The girl had forgotten to give a message from Aelia to the master, Sextus Cornelius, telling him that she would be late in coming in and that he was not to let dinner wait for her. The message not having been delivered Sextus waited for some time peevishly. When the offence was discovered Iris was flogged by the man-slave whose task it was to flog slaves. 'It was not the master, though,' she said when at last the words came quickly, 'it was the mistress who ordered it. It nearly always is. Not that she flogs much, I'm told, as things go. But it's my fourth time altogether, and it's going to be the last. She shan't do it again.' The slave spoke with sullen anger. 'I would sooner be dead. She can kill me all at once if she likes, but if she tries to flog me, I would kill myself or her!'

'Hush!' said Metella, looking anxiously towards the door lest

some member of the household, perhaps another slave seeking to curry favour, should have heard and report the rebel's words. 'You must not say such things even if you don't mean them.'

'I mean them,' said the girl. 'I made up my mind last time that no one should flog me again. Why should I go on being flogged all my life for nothing? I meant no harm when I forgot the message. If he waited half an hour, it did him no great harm. We often have to wait half a day for him! And I was born as free as either of them. I will not stop here — I will escape and get back to my own country.' She looked defiantly at Metella.

'You won't do any of these silly things,' said Metella. 'You would be sorry if you did. You would suffer much worse. You will stop here, be patient, obey orders and wait — until I see what I can do for you. Promise me!'

'What can you do for me?'

'You must wait patiently! I have an idea. I won't tell you exactly because it may not succeed, but I will try to put you where you will not be in danger of being flogged again. But you must promise to behave well and not get into trouble, or I can't do anything.'

The slave bent suddenly and kissed Metella's hand. 'I promise,' she said.

'Now we must go,' said Metella, 'or they'll be looking for me.'

In the other room the ladies had been discussing the slave problem. They said they did not know what things were coming to. It was almost impossible to get good slaves at all. If you trained them, your best friend expected to be allowed to buy them from you. They were always falling sick. If you treated them well they expected still more from you. If you treated them severely they sulked or answered you back, and sometimes, no matter what the punishment, they were disobedient. There were so many of them that you could hardly get about decently in your own city of Rome. Really, Roman ladies would be driven to do their own housework. That would teach the slaves a lesson. They would be in a nice fix with no one to support them.

'On the other hand,' said Metella, who, as she entered, had heard what was being said, 'they would be free and that would be nice for them.'

'It wouldn't do them much good,' commented Aelia, 'if they

had nothing to eat.' She looked round as though amused. 'Our dear Metella,' she explained, 'is a little sentimental about slaves.'

While Metella, though saying nothing, coloured and shook her head, there was a second, more violent commotion. Lollia, uttering a loud shriek, sprang to her feet. While the little Quintus now crawled rapidly towards his mother, growling more furiously than ever, she clutched the calf of her leg and denounced him loudly. 'The little brat!' she cried, 'the little hypocrite! He came close to me, pretending to be playing his wild-beast game, and suddenly he pinched my leg. You mark my words, Valeria, he'll come to a bad end. And so will you. Some day he'll put poison in your wine and he'll look so smug that someone else will be put to death for it. You should tie him up and thrash him. . . .'

'Oh no,' his mother protested. 'That would be very wrong. Artemidora says that if only he is allowed at present, and even encouraged, to do whatever he likes —'

'It would do Artemidora a heap of good,' interrupted Lollia, 'if all her fifteen pupils bit her and went on doing it until she gave up teaching children, about which she knows nothing. I'd give her teaching!'

'Oh but, Lollia, she knows a great deal,' said Valeria, rather flustered. 'My husband says that she knows as much as though she had children of her own. Not that she ever had, but she's so intelligent. She is quite sure that Quintus will be a great soldier some day. She's not only practical; she's really got vision. She says we shall be very, very proud of Quintus.' Then, addressing Aelia, 'Well, I think we'd better be going. I'm so sorry if this high-spirited boy has spoiled your party. He's been so good lately. I think he's excited. Perhaps it's seeing all these lovely paintings. He's very sensitive. I wish I had been able to stay and see your husband. I'm sure he'll have exciting news about the Emperor and Sejanus. I do hope it will be really good news, Aelia. Come, Quintus.'

She said farewell to Aelia and the guests. As he passed through the door Quintus, turning round, gave them all a demure smile, at which they were just about to exclaim with pleasure when he spat violently at them. He was dragged away abruptly by his mother.

Lollia spoke again. 'No one really knows how to bring up

children. No one. I've never had any myself, but I know the subject well. Parents train their families in the most various ways and, whichever way they choose, they never know how the children are going to turn out. My grandfather had two cousins who became famous. One of them was left completely free as a boy to go his own road. All his father did was to surround him with good influences and to lead him by pure example to become a sound conservative, a follower of Pompey and Cicero and the constitutional party. But the boy wasn't like that at all. He turned rebel. He took part in a conspiracy against the State, escaped with his life, fled to Asia and joined the pirates. What? Yes, the pirates. The other one was brought up rigidly. He had to obey orders in the smallest matters. He was given no liberty. He did in fact join Pompey and the "good" side. Then, when he was an officer on one of the ships sent against the pirates —'

Metella broke in. 'I know, I know! It's a famous story. The good Pompeian brother captured the bad pirate and converted him.'

Lollia was delighted. 'Believe me, the bad pirate converted the good brother, who turned pirate himself. He was much the worse of the two. The things he did when he captured Pompeians were dreadful. I daren't mention them here. He must have been saving up all the time that he was good. It was a notorious scandal. But as pirates both brothers did really well — they had always been nice, hard-working boys — and when they retired they were rich men. When the civil war broke out between Pompey and Julius Caesar they lent money to Caesar and helped him to conquer the province of Asia. After his victory they wanted to come back to Rome, but there were difficulties. I believe that the families of the Pompeians whom they had murdered showed some feeling about it. Tempers were frayed at that time. However, the brothers were rewarded with high places in one of our priesthoods. Eventually they died in — what do they always call it in the Senate, Aelia? — yes, thank you, in the odour of sanctity, and they left a lot of very useful money. Nobody refuses it now because of its origin. No, where children are concerned you never can tell.'

Metella asked her — 'How will Quintus turn out, Lollia?'

'What was the game he liked so much when he was growling all round the floor?' she replied. 'But really, Aelia my dear, I'm

afraid I shall have to go if your husband doesn't come in a minute. Where on earth is he? These Senators can't stop talking. I never knew such gossips.'

'Much worse than we are!' said Aelia. 'But it's excusable to-day. I imagine he's waiting until it's known whether a letter about Sejanus has come from the Emperor.' She spoke gravely. 'You know there's one expected and it will mean much for all of us.' A thrill went through the company. With this encouragement they would certainly wait for the news which not only they but Rome, and all the Roman Empire, now expected.

It was four years since the Emperor Tiberius, at the age of sixty-seven, had suddenly withdrawn from Rome to the little island of Capreae, near Naples. In the same way thirty-three years earlier he had abandoned public life in Rome, deserted the Court of Augustus and offended him by retiring to Rhodes, where he remained, a voluntary exile, for seven years. Morose and suspicious, weary of the quarrels and intrigues around him, especially in his own family, despising the mob and the need to pamper it, fearful of those who either were or might be plotting against him, he shut himself away in Capreae and trusted more and more to Sejanus. This man did not belong by birth to the nobility who had made Rome great. He sprang from the order of Equites, or Knights, of whom Augustus and his successor, Tiberius, made increasing use. Among the aristocracy there were many who, openly or secretly, longed for the return of the Republic and its freedom; all the more did the Emperors turn to the Knights, many of whom were men of brains and character. The father of Sejanus had been one of these; the son excelled the father. He was efficient, determined and devoted to the Emperor. On one occasion he had saved the Emperor's life at the risk of his own. He had risen by now to the highest rank. He was Prefect of the Praetorian Guard and so held Rome in his power on behalf of his master while his master was away.

He had been made Consul for this year along with the Emperor himself, and whom could the Emperor intend to succeed him when he died except the man whom, so late in life, he chose to share the Consulship? All men asked the question. The chief obstacle, they thought, was the young prince Gaius Caligula, son of Germanicus, the Emperor's nephew, who had died twelve

years before, and his wife Agrippina. Roman society had been thrilled recently to hear that the Emperor had summoned Gaius to join him at Capreae and had given him high honours. Gaius was nineteen years of age. When his father commanded the legions in Germany he had gone about the camp wearing 'Caligae', the high boots of the soldier, and the legionaries, making a pet of him, had named him Caligula. Now he was with Tiberius. Even if he was far away while Sejanus was in Rome, the seat of power, uncertainty still tormented the favourite. Sejanus might be Prefect of the Guard but Gaius, by a sudden stroke, might be acknowledged as successor by Tiberius.

CHAPTER II

THERE were voices and a stirring outside, the door opened and Sextus Cornelius came in. With him was his son Aulus, a youth of about twenty-two. The Senator was tall and thin, with a bird-like face. He was full of dignity. He knew how important he was, and he expected others to know. When he talked he from time to time pressed his lips sharply together as a sign that he was a man of strong will. He was vain and touchy. He accumulated grievances, cherishing them with the greed of a collector and nourishing them until they occupied his mind to the exclusion of all worthy activity. He could only forgive his best friends if they flattered him. An aristocrat himself, he felt that the great Sejanus, whose father had only been a Knight, should be pleased to be related to him and his wife, and he assumed that if the brilliant adventurer, whom in moments of irritation he called a careerist, now became Emperor his own merits would be justly recognized. On this morning, full of repressed excitement, he was a most genial. He looked quickly round the room, greeting the guests with a special word for one or two.

'Ah, Metella, my dear, I'm glad to see you. You're usually so busy — but I know whom you came to see! Well, I've brought him with me. He's been urging me all the morning to get back here quickly, and now I understand why.' 'Ah, Lollia! Well, and who's going to win the great chariot race to-morrow? Oh,

of course, I had forgotten. Fortunatus is driving, isn't he? Nobody but Fortunatus can be allowed to win a chariot-race — eh, Lollia?

They all laughed, some with malice, others with envy. Lollia's weakness for the clever, ugly charioteer was well known, not least to himself, who in this field also was extremely competent. Then Sextus, looking at the slaves, nodded to his wife. She dismissed them with a wave of the hand and when Aulus at a gesture from his father had shut the door on them, she said:

'Well, Sextus, what is it? Has anything been heard?'

One or two of the ladies bent forward in their eagerness. One or two shifted their limbs nervously. One or two stiffened. All were intent on his face, expectant for news that might change their personal fortunes, whether or not, which mattered to them much less, it transformed the face of the Roman world.

Sextus pressed his lips together, nodded, waited a second and spoke gravely. 'Yes, it's settled. Caesar has promised formally at last. Caesar has decided that Sejanus shall take a wife from Caesar's own family. It will be announced soon.' He paused, then said emphatically, 'A wife from his own family! Of course, that settles it.' He expelled a deep breath and sighed, as though burdened by a great responsibility. The guests relaxed, turning towards each other as though to begin talking again. But Aelia spoke:

'Then who is it, Sextus? Is it Livilla?'

In a moment they were taut again, listening for the answer.

'Yes,' said Sextus. 'Livilla. It is not announced, of course, but it will be Livilla. Who else could it be? After all, she and Sejanus for years have been —' he stopped, saw the quivering eagerness on some of the faces and ended lamely — 'they've been great friends for years.'

Livilla was believed by many to have been the mistress of Sejanus before the death of her husband eight years earlier. She was the sister of the Germanicus who was father of Gaius Caligula. She had married her cousin Drusus, Tiberius's only son and his intended successor, who had died, it was said, of a fever. If now Tiberius had promised her to Sejanus, was any other proof of his intentions needed?

There was a little murmur of congratulation, then they fell

silent. They were almost all relatives or friends or supporters of Sejanus. His elevation to sole power might verily make the fortunes of Sextus and Aelia, who stood near to him, but it should profit others besides. One of them thought that her husband might get a provincial governorship or at least something handsome on a Governor's staff; another that her brother might secure a job in Rome itself which would bring some badly needed money into the house; a third wondered whether her husband might not be sent to some country so remote that she herself, remaining in Rome, could conduct an intrigue with a rich Knight more comfortably than she did now. Most of them looked forward to a more fashionable part in Roman society. Aelia Memmia tried to look into her son's future. Sejanus liked him. In any event if Sejanus — whom, so far as she knew, his own family had never regarded as very intelligent — could reach these great heights, who should put limits to the career of her son, who was so much more clever? As they thought thus, there stole into their minds the question how long Tiberius would live, this disappointed, morbid old recluse, now seventy-one years old, whom none would miss. Their lips did not utter what their minds conceived, for if the thought was suspect expression would be dangerous. Already in Rome you must not speculate about Caesar's death lest you be assumed to desire it or, worst of all, intend it. As they crushed the thought down and looked gay and turned towards Aelia to congratulate her on this fine piece of news, the fresh, clear voice of Metella was heard saying:

'Caesar won't live long now, will he, even if nothing happens to him? He's over seventy.'

They fell silent and at the same time were on the alert as though the unhappy words might bring an immediate penalty. What a fool the girl was! How inconsiderate not only to her host and hostess but to all of them! Lollia smiled grimly and looked pleased when she saw the cold anger on the face of Aelia. Sextus, who had just been about to speak, remained with mouth open for a second. Then he looked round and, making sure that there were no slaves left in the room, sighed with relief. A pretty thing it would have been if any of them had told their fellow-slaves in the house and those next door, and all over Rome too, that someone in his house, his future daughter-in-law, had been

saying that Caesar would soon be dead now that Sejanus was marked to succeed him. That was a short way to lose the friendship of Sejanus first and his own life afterwards. He congratulated himself that he had been so wise as to turn the slayers out of the room. It was a fine thing for his wife and son and their friends that he was so prudent. Prudence was badly needed under these Caesars, but he had it. He had not attached himself completely to Sejanus until it was pretty certain that Caesar had made up his mind. Prudence had bidden him be cautious and now prudence bade him come out boldly on Sejanus's side. But really this girl was almost impossible. If Aulus married her she would have to learn that great discretion was imposed on anyone who was allowed to enter the family of Sextus Cornelius Flaccus. With a reproving look at Metella he said loudly, 'May Caesar be spared to us yet for many years! He is still young in spirit and the gods have given him good health. Rome cannot do without him; we desire no successor, however worthy, to him. May the day be far off when a successor is needed! May that successor, in a distant day, follow our Caesar in wisdom, generosity and' — he paused slightly — 'glory in the field!'

They applauded Sextus. They felt that he spoke like a statesman. They considered that he had wiped out the tactlessness of Metella. But what was this about military glory?

'Oho!' said Lollia. 'So there's a campaign in prospect, is there? Come now, tell us about it, Sextus!'

'Yes,' said Aelia. 'You must tell us, Sextus. You know that you and your Senatorial friends tell all these things to each other, of course always under the seal of secrecy. We know what you say to each other! "Strictly between ourselves I may tell you" or "Within these four walls I may mention" or "For your private ear I may say". But you tell each other all the same. Where's the new war going to be, Sextus?'

They all begged him for an answer and he could not resist them.

'If Sejanus,' he said, 'is to become Caesar he must, either before or after, hold a command in the field, win military victories and be hailed as Imperator. Julius Caesar was a great soldier. Divine Augustus triumphed in many lands. Our own Caesar has won glory on all our northern frontiers. His brother and his

nephew both fought victoriously against the Germans. Sejanus also, as ruler, must gain the allegiance which a successful general always wins from the army. Who holds the legions holds the Roman Empire — that is the first principle of statecraft to-day. Perhaps Caesar will send Sejanus to the frontiers soon. If not, when he succeeds to power, he must himself set out without much delay to make the conquest which will round off Rome's Empire in the north.'

'I knew it,' said Lollia. 'Britain! Britain at last! And high time, too! How long is it since the great Julius Caesar said "I came, I saw and I came back again"? More than eighty years ago, surely. My father always said it was a great disgrace for Rome to have been forced to retreat by a lot of painted savages. He was always bringing it into his public speeches. "Remember Britain!" he used to say until people got thoroughly tired of him.'

'Why can't we leave Britain alone?' said Metella. 'The Britons are poor, dirty and uncivilized. They can't possess anything that is worth having, otherwise we should have taken it from them long ago. My father says that there's a famous letter in which Cicero told his friend Trebatius — my father's always quoting Cicero, you know — that there was not an ounce of gold or silver in the wilds of Britain, so that he had better capture a British war chariot and hurry back to Rome as fast as he could. The Emperor Augustus never attacked the Britons and neither has our present Caesar. I'm sure they only want to be let alone.'

'My dear child,' said the Senator, smiling but severe, 'when you are older you will know that these affairs of State are not so simple. If the Britons want to be let alone they should behave differently. For many years they have given us every provocation. If there is a "forward" party among us Senators, it is because we know that only by going forward can we be secure. That is all we want — security, real security, no more but certainly no less. Have you any idea what these Britons do?' He addressed Metella, but his eye was on them all. 'Why, they harbour the most dangerous among our enemies in Gaul. They nourish them and send them back again to fight against us. They cross the narrow straits themselves, raid our coastal camps, carry off outposts and are gone before we can arrest them. They welcome

deserters from the legions — and there are alas! such traitors to our standards. There will be no peace in Gaul, there will be no security for us there, until we have conquered all Britain, and not only Britain but another great island lying still further to the west whose inhabitants, we are told, are even more savage, reckless and irresponsible — yes, that is the right word — than the Britons. Here statecraft and strategy are one. Here the Senator at home and the soldier in the field agree. We must advance. Here alone is wisdom, here courage, here self-preservation.’ The Senator paused, looked round for the applause of his audience, pressed his lips together and went on:

‘We must not neglect wider horizons. If we have a primary duty to Rome, we must think also of the interests of these poor barbarians. The bad days of the dying republic, when the provincials were ruthlessly exploited, are gone nor will return. Caesar forbids. Towards people like these Britons we have a civilizing mission. Our conscience forbids that we should leave them in ignorance and squalor. They have no roads, so we shall give them roads; our soldiers first and their merchants afterwards will make use of them. We shall bring them good water, aqueducts and baths. We shall give them drains, a noble Roman gift. We shall give them a pure religion instead of their loathsome sacrifices so that their minds may be at peace. We shall sell them the generous Italian wines so that they may be gay. They shall have all from us: learning and laws, architecture, a sense of order, discipline. They shall share in them if they will; if not, they will at least have our example. Even though they do not thank us for any of these gifts, we shall bring them all the same. Over all we shall spread the immense majesty of the Roman peace, remembering how the greatest of our national poets has said that the duty of the Roman is — ’

‘Heavens!’ said Lollia. ‘If the man isn’t going to quote tags from Virgil at us — “to spare the conquered and wear down the proud”, isn’t that it, Sextus? I’m sure we should think much more of Virgil if we didn’t have to learn him at school. Still, the Senate would get on badly without him; whatever would they do without “I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts”, “a mind conscious of right”, “from one learn all” and “the Gods willed otherwise”?’

'Why, Lollia,' said Metella, 'what a lot of Virgil you know. You *are* secretive.'

'Don't you mock me, my girl. I know more quotations, at any rate, than my father and mother. My father knew only one passage in Horace but he was very fond of it — "Nunc est bibendum", he was always saying — "Now we must drink"; and my mother always replied with the only passage she knew in Cicero — "O tempora! O mores!" — "Oh, what times! Oh, what manners!" But you know, Sextus, you've missed out one thing in your Empire-building. Slaves! That's the best reason for conquering Britain that I know of. How can respectable people earn a living unless there are new conquests and more slaves to sell?'

Metella struck in with bright eyes and eager voice. 'Yes, I've often wondered how much the slave market had to do with our making war. We invade the Germans or the Gauls or the Britons because we say they are going to invade us, or we provoke them to attack us. We defeat them in battle and take crowds of prisoners, whom we sell as slaves. Then we make terms of peace and take hostages to make sure that the terms are kept. The terms are not kept, so we sell the hostages as slaves. This enrages their people, who attack us, so that we have to defeat them in battle and take more prisoners, whom we sell as slaves. The enemy again makes terms of peace, and again we take hostages . . . and that, I suppose, is how Rome conquered the world.'

'At any rate, that is how Rome became a comfortable place to live in,' corrected Lollia, 'thanks to our sagacious Senate. But my dear child, as our host says, you ought to look at wider horizons. Consider how much these awful Britons will benefit by serving civilized Romans.'

'Yes, of course, I know,' said Metella. 'And we can do so much more for them than that. Since they have not the Roman Games we can bring them to the Games in Rome. We can introduce our new subjects to quite new animals. They have no lions or tigers, I believe, so we can present them to lions and tigers in the arena. Crocodiles, too — so novel for them! We can even give them arms to fight the beasts with, or set a dozen of them naked to fight a tiger with bare hands and teeth. The Roman peace! Why not let them alone?'

The Senator was annoyed. He was all the more annoyed when

he saw that Aulus was regarding Metella with amused admiration. But he felt that it would be undignified to be angry. 'Well, well,' he said, 'you women!' I would remind you, Lollia, of what your friend Virgil —'

'My friend, indeed!' said Lollia —

'said about women. "Always a changeful, fickle thing" he called her, so I shan't take your jesting seriously. But really these affairs of State are difficult for women, who — through no fault of their own, of course — have had little experience of politics.'

'No, no, Sextus!' protested Aelia. 'That won't do. You're not going to tell us that Roman women don't understand politics just as well as men. Wasn't it Agrippina, the mother of Gaius Caligula, whom Sejanus feared most of all lest she should secure the succession for one of her children? And didn't Livia, Tiberius's mother, rule Rome almost as much as her husband, the Divine Augustus? Did he ever do anything important without consulting her? You know he didn't. And she only died two years ago.'

'At any rate our Caesar didn't approve of her even if she was his mother,' Sextus was condescending. 'He thought she interfered too much in State affairs.'

'What he really disliked,' said Metella, 'was that when there was a big fire in the city she used to rush out and urge the watchmen and firemen to greater efforts. She loved a fire but Caesar didn't like her getting the publicity. He was jealous. Besides, there's Cleopatra. She wasn't a Roman, but she was so clever that Augustus himself couldn't rest until he had driven her to suicide. She and Livia knew as much about politics as any man in Rome.'

The Senator frowned, not knowing what Metella might say next. He was uneasy sometimes about this marriage; there were risks in it. He gave a little nod to his wife, who rose and the guests got up to go. Aulus greeted them as they left, while Aelia went up to Metella, took her arm with a dry little smile and said, 'You'll have to worry less about slaves and Britons, my dear, and more about your house and children when you are married!'

'But I'm not going to get married, Aelia — not for a long time yet.'

Aelia said tolerantly, 'You must ask your father about that, my

dear, when you get home. I think you'll find he's interested in this news about Sejanus. It may make a great deal of difference to us all. Sejanus likes Aulus, you know, and he owes us something for our support.'

'I must go, Aelia,' Metella said hurriedly. 'They will be waiting for me at home. I'm late already.'

'Aulus will go with you. Here he is. You can tell him your views about the treatment of slaves. He'll probably agree with you if he sees you want him to.' There was a little bitterness in her voice. 'You're a lucky girl, Metella.'

'Who's lucky?' said Aulus, appearing suddenly, 'and why?'

'You are,' replied Metella. 'Because you're going to see me home. Come along.'

No sooner had they left Aelia than Metella touched Aulus's arm. 'Aulus, I've something important to say to you.'

'There's something important I want to say to you. When can I come and say it?'

'We'll see. Yes, of course, you shall say anything you want to. But not now. No, not now. I must hurry or my father will be starting his nap and I want to speak to him first. And I want you to do something for me about that slave-girl Iris.'

'Iris? Oh, yes, the little Jewish spitfire. There's been some trouble about her. She's impudent or something of the kind. So my mother says and she doesn't like it. She's a hard woman is my mother.'

'The girl's been horribly beaten — I saw her arm — it's brutal. No one has any right to do it.'

Aulus was amused. 'Oh, right!' he said. 'And slaves! We have the rights because we have the force, and the rest doesn't count. Isn't that so?' Then he saw Metella's excited, earnest face, and the indignation that was coming over it. 'Sorry,' he said, 'I forgot how serious you are about these slaves. But what's the point about the Jewess?'

'I want her sold to my father so that she may become my personal servant. At once. Your mother and father won't like it. They don't approve of my views. But they'll do it for you. I want your help to make them.' She put her hand on his arm and spoke urgently. 'You'll help me, won't you?'

Aulus — whose full name was Aulus Cornelius Rufus — was

unlike his father and mother. He was shortish, rather thick-set and full-faced, with a ready smile that was thought genial until one saw that his eyes remained steadily cold. For a moment or two he did not reply. He was wondering how he could turn Metella's request to his own advantage. His support was worth having and worth paying for.

He heard her repeating, 'You'll help me, Aulus, won't you?'

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'I'll help, you may be sure. But it may not be easy. The parents probably won't want to do it. They don't like the girl. She has too much spirit for them. It's the way she looks, I think, when anyone threatens her. They were talking the other day of selling her if she didn't improve.'

Metella cried out. She remembered the advice about slaves which Cato the Elder, whom all Rome professed to respect for his simple virtues, had given to the farmer: how he was to sell off old farm implements, worn-out oxen, blemished cattle, blemished sheep, old wagons, old slaves and sickly slaves, and to that, she thought, he would have added rebellious slaves had he thought it possible that any slave of his dare be rebellious. The old slave, the sick slave, the defiant slave: they were all sold off cheap, and cheaper still at each successive sale, to one brute after another until at last the life was out of them.

'There's no hurry, I suppose?' added Aulus.

'Yes, there is,' she answered. 'There's no telling what will happen if I don't get her away. To herself or to others, I mean. I saw how she looked. She won't submit.'

Aulus whistled. 'She'll come to a bad end.' He stopped short. 'Well, I'll have to think how best to go about it. I'll be seeing you again to-morrow. Metella, you wouldn't like to go with me to the Games, would you? We could go to-morrow. Sejanus is giving them — wild beasts, gladiators, prisoners of war, criminals — the biggest show for years. And we should see how the people receive Sejanus — the news about Caesar's latest favours will have got about by then. I suppose you wouldn't come? Or was last time enough?'

Metella nodded. 'Too much!' she said. 'No more for me.'

Six months earlier she had gone with Aulus to the amphitheatre dressed as a boy. The Emperor Augustus had forbidden women to be present at the blood-spilling of the arena but some

of them went openly, defying interference, and occasionally one would disguise herself as a man. Metella had gone as an adventure and had found it a miserable failure. She had drawn attention to herself by waving the customary white cloth demanding mercy every time that a victorious fighter waited to know whether he should or should not kill his defeated enemy. The great man who was giving the Games — he was one of the Praetors for the year — noticed her and was amused by her determination. On one occasion, when, alone among thousands, she turned her thumb up, demanding death, he openly supported her. The defeated man was a criminal monster, a slave, who had been condemned not to immediate death but to fight for twelve months in the arena and, if he survived so long, to be killed at the finish. He was a strong brute who had won many victories. The crowd loved him and on the rare occasions when he was defeated, reprimanded him, so that he could fight again. They were determined to keep him fighting till his last hour, when they looked forward to seeing him extinguished bloodily. On Metella's visit to the arena he had only three more days to live. The spirit had gone out of him, to postpone death for a few more wretched hours was not worth while, and he was twice thrown helpless to the ground. The second time, also, the crowd was all for sparing him. Metella, crying out to Aulus, 'Let him die — why torture him?' — turned her thumb up, thrusting it defiantly out towards the mob, who howled their derision at her. The Praetor looked and laughed, then turned his thumb up too, and the merciful death stroke was given.

'No,' said Metella, 'I won't go. I'll never go again. If you have influence with Sejanus, get him to stop it all.'

'Stop it! Why, he'll have to give the people Games far more than our Caesar or Augustus either — for the same reason that he's got to conquer Britain. He's an upstart, a mere Knight. He doesn't belong to the line of Julius Caesar or to the Claudian house, who are almost gods themselves. So he's got to keep the public on his side. That means gifts and Games and military conquest. But he may be useful to us — to you and me, I mean.'

Metella said nothing. She knew that Aulus himself cared little or nothing about Sejanus but much about Sejanus's rival,

the young Gaius, who was of his own age and with whom for some years he had been brought up.

'Well,' said Aulus, 'I'm going to be there because I want to see how the people treat Sejanus. I'll come to your house afterwards and tell you what I think about it. Of course you know there's nothing I wouldn't do to please you, and you know why.'

Metella avoided answering. They were in sight of her own house and, at the door and apparently just about to leave, was Lucius Paetus. He was about the same age as Aulus but slight of body, serious in face, shy and self-conscious; he lacked the cool assurance of his rival, and, alas for himself, knew it.

'Aha!' said Aulus, 'the hungry suitor starving at the gate. He is jealous of me, Metella. He burns, he is tormented. But you must beware. Look at the cloud that gathers on his Vesuvian brow! Shall we turn back?'

'Don't be absurd, Aulus, and don't mock at him or I shall be angry with you. Maybe you think he's not as quick as you, but he's quick enough for me. And he's clever, even if he's not quick!'

'Oh, yes, I know — the pale and thoughtful student! I dare say there is no harm in him. Did you know that my mother is rather impressed by him?'

'Your mother? I didn't know she knew him. How was she impressed?'

'She got him to the house last week. Just curiosity! She wanted to see what he's like that you take such an interest in him. She found him shy, honest and serious — all the things I'm not. I could like him myself if it wasn't that I'm going to marry you — there, it had to come out, but you knew — so for him there's only this!' and he turned his thumbs up.

Metella smiled at him. 'I could like you myself, Aulus, if it wasn't that you're so sure you're going to marry me.'

They had reached Lucius. 'Did you come to see me?' asked Metella. Her voice and her eyes, Aulus noticed, had a new warmth in them. For all his confidence he was annoyed. She's forgotten I'm here, he thought, as Metella went on: 'I'm sorry I'm late but I didn't expect you. I've been at Aelia Memmia's waiting for the news.'

'On the way here,' said Aulus gravely, 'we have been con-

sidering the future of your flame, the Jewish girl Iris. We think that in her own interest she should be removed as soon as possible from your dangerous influence.'

'What do you mean about my "flame"?' said Lucius angrily. 'I don't know the girl. I've never seen her —'

'Oh, come now!' protested Aulus. 'You're not going to let the girl down, are you? She served you with some very precious wine a week ago, because I saw her, and unless I'm mistaken you didn't appreciate the wine and the reason was that you had your mind fixed not on it but on the girl.'

'Aulus,' said Metella, 'you do not know what it means to speak the truth. You must get into the Senate as soon as possible. Now run away. And you must let me know about Iris to-morrow. Come in the morning.'

'I will let you know,' he said. Then, turning to Lucius, 'I leave you in possession — for a few moments. You had better make the most of them. But would you like me to give a message to the pretty Jewess for you?' He went off laughing.

Lucius looked after him gloomily, then he burst out — 'Why does he lie about me? What is he doing for you? Why do you let him do anything for you? Why don't you ask me? Why is it always him?'

Metella treated him like a child. 'Silly boy! Why do you let him anger you? You only encourage him. The more you show your annoyance, the more pleased he becomes. And there's nothing to be cross about. I want their slave Iris for my own and I've asked him to persuade his parents to let her go. I couldn't ask you because you aren't her owner. If you were I needn't ask you because you wouldn't have ill-treated her as they have. That old cat Aelia!'

'I don't like it. You know you're putting yourself under an obligation to him, and he'll remind you of it. I know what he thinks about you and what he wants —'

'Does it matter what he wants? It is what I want that should matter, and you know what that is. Now come in. I'm going straight to see my father about Iris. You go and wait in my room and I'll come to you after he's promised to do what I want.'

They went in together.

METELLA's father, Publius Antonius Celer, who also was a Senator, was sitting in his study reading the historian Livy, before he had his rest. He was a placid, kindly man who read incessantly and sometimes wrote both prose and verse himself. The floor of the study was a mosaic. The outer parts, nearest to the walls, consisted of three panels of geometrical pattern, which became more elaborate the nearer they were to the centre. The centre itself was made up of two circles. The inner contained representations of the Egyptian pyramids with tiny figures at the base; round the outer marched a procession of the great wild animals — rhinoceros and elephant, lion, camel and hippopotamus. Let into the walls of the room were cupboards whose shelves were filled with books in the form of rolls; there were hundreds of them. Opposite a large table which Publius himself used was a small one at which the slave sat who looked after the books, cleaning them, trimming the leaves or securing them more firmly to the strip of wood which was their 'binding'. There were busts on pedestals round the walls. The three Caesars — Julius, Augustus and Tiberius — were there and so was Cato, the famous Republican who fell on his sword when he saw freedom finally crushed by Julius Caesar. He was now only a dim Republican figure and until recently Romans could honour him without danger to themselves. On his own table Publius had smaller busts of the poet Horace, whom he loved for his grace and wit, and of Cicero, the orator, whom, however, he did not like more for his oratory than for his hesitation between the warring leaders in the civil war. 'That's how I should have felt myself,' said Publius.

Publius always got much pleasure from reading about the early Romans who were frugal, honest and devout. He liked to think that he might himself have been an early Roman, Cincinnatus or someone like that, except they were always men of such tremendous energy. He contrasted their virtues with the vices of Rome for the last hundred years or more — greed, fraud, personal ambition, violence. He was sometimes so much moved by the

contrast that he wondered whether he might not himself be a reformer, one of Rome's second founders, but he feared that they would have to show the same robust, restless energy as their ancestors. A lover of comfort, he was quietly determined not to lose it. Long-continued family misfortunes had taught him that he must be watchful. More than a century ago one of his ancestors had been murdered in the massacre conducted by the ruffians of the democrat Marius. Another had been put to death, although with the consolations of legality, by Marius's rival, the noble Sulla. Forty years later another, having been forgiven once by Julius Caesar for his services to the Pompeians, had fought against him again in Africa. He had had the misfortune, after Caesar's victory at Thapsus, to fall into the hands of Caesar's soldiers who, irritated that they had to defeat the same opponents twice, hacked him in pieces. When Mark Antony, Octavianus (afterwards the Emperor Augustus) and Lepidus became allies, some of the family names appeared on the lists of the proscribed which the Triumvirs issued. It could not be otherwise in days when 300 Senators and 2000 Knights were being slaughtered. When, later, Antony and Octavianus quarrelled and fought, the family suffered even worse. Mark Antony could not be expected to spare any of his own house who deserted him nor Octavianus those who did not. Thus there were many examples of a violent end to encourage Publius Antonius to be careful. He himself had been well treated by Augustus, whom he served faithfully although without unreasonable exertion. To a friend asking whether he still suffered from his old ailment, sleeplessness, he had replied, 'Not during the debates in the Senate.' If indolent, he tried to be wary. He had his wife and Metella to think of. He must not make the mistake, if a choice of sides had ever to be made, of choosing wrongly as so many of his family had done before him. He had been much troubled about the future; it was so hard to know what was going to happen about the succession to power: about Caesar and Gaius Caligula and Sejanus.

He sometimes thought that just by going on patiently he might overcome all difficulties. After all, those masters of tactics whom he greatly respected, Ulysses and Aeneas, although they had lived uncomfortably, had come through at the end. Then he

reflected that each of them had had unusual advantages. Whenever either of them was in a tight corner some god or goddess had appeared to get him out of it. In small things and in great Athene of the grey eyes watched over Ulysses. Daughter of Zeus, Maiden, Unweariable, she thought nothing of stilling the winds in order to assist him. If, after spending seventeen days on a raft and swimming for two days and two nights in the sea, he at last reached land with torn skin and swollen face, she would present him in a few hours to a group of girls as a tall, fine man with his hair close curled like the flowers of a hyacinth. And when, along with his son and faithful herdsman, he fought the last great battle against the suitors, the grey-eyed goddess was there, turning away the arrows and javelins and lances so that they hit anything but him. Then there was Aeneas, the founder of Rome. He was even better off. He had the lovely goddess Aphrodite for his mother. When he was like to be killed by Diomedes during the siege of Troy she put her white arms round him and spread her robe before his face. Then she carried him away, and when she herself, though a goddess, was wounded by Diomedes and dropped her son, Apollo, the Far-Darter, the god of the silver bow, removed him far off and set in his place a dummy, a wraith, for Greeks and Trojans to fight over. Such things never happened to him, Publius, nor, so far as he knew, to anyone else in Rome. Besides, if you had one god on your side, you were sure to have another against you. If Athene saved you from the sea, it was because Poseidon, the great earthshaking god, had tried to drown you in it. On the whole it seemed to Publius that the moral, if there was one, was that men were the sport of the gods, if any gods there were. He had noticed, too, about these heroes, whom for some things he would have liked to take as models, that they were exceptionally vigorous, pushful and full of fire. Aeneas was like a lion confident in his strength, Ulysses was like a lion on the mountains bred. He himself had never felt like that.

Publius did not, however, think that one should neglect any chance of divine assistance, however small. He had therefore made a practice of consulting astrologers and soothsayers. He had been encouraged in this by his experience of a well-known soothsayer called Medon. At a time when there was a sharp political crisis he had asked Medon whether, if he should inter-

vene in the Senate, he could rely on making a success of it. The astrologer, after much study, and after discovering that Publius longed to speak, assured him of success. The speech was so successful that the Emperor himself, sitting in the Senate, had thanked the orator. Publius, thinking it over, felt that it was the confidence given him by the astrologer's prediction that had won him his victory and was the more grateful. Shortly afterwards he consulted Medon about the result of a chariot race which was causing much excitement and heavy betting. Medon predicted that Scorpus, one of the best known charioteers of that time, would win. Publius went straight to Scorpus in order that knowledge of the prediction might inspire him with decisive confidence. Scorpus, while thanking him, mentioned that he saw three difficulties: every charioteer in the race had received a similar prediction from some well-known astrologer; the prediction, and therefore the decisive confidence generated by it, could be communicated to the driver but not to his horses; and the best member of his own team, the world-famous Felix, was entirely off his feed. Publius, disconcerted, hurried off with this baffling news to Medon. The soothsayer, being himself (like many of his brethren) in close touch with the stables, had already heard about Felix, and addressing Publius before he could speak, said he had been trying to find him, that he had discovered a most regrettable mistake in his first calculations and that the directions of the stars were now so enigmatic that he doubted whether Scorpus would race at all. Publius went away pleased, considering that Medon had shown himself to be as honest in this case as he had been wise in the other.

At the moment when Metella was returning, Publius was feeling more cheerful than usual. He had heard news when he was at the Senate House which he thought would settle the doubts that had been worrying him. Now Metella entered the room.

'Ah, there you are, my dear,' he said. He crossed the room, placed his rolled-up copy of Livy carefully on the librarian's little table and returned to his chair.

'Do you know, Metella, that last night the Consuls came to see me about a certain matter and one of them took that book from me — in jest, of course — and threw it across the room in order to see if he could drop it in the right place on the table?

Never marry a man, Metella, who would so treat a book. He will certainly commit murder.'

'Has the Consul committed murder?' asked Metella.

'There is still time,' said Publius. 'I have no doubt he will. Probably several. But talking of marriage, my dear —'

Metella interrupted. 'Father, I want to speak to you.'

'And I to you, my dear. Metella, you're nearly eighteen years old —'

Metella took no notice. 'Father, I want you to buy a slave-girl from Sextus Cornelius and give her to me for my own. She's ill-used there, she's been ill-treated, and she'll do some injury to herself or someone else. You've often said I must have a girl of my own. You must buy her for my eighteenth birthday. And I want you to do it now. I'm afraid they'll sell her as a rebel. You mustn't let them. It would be terrible if anything happened to her now. I would never forgive myself. Father, you must.'

Publius thought rapidly. Things were turning out rather better than he expected. The way was being smoothed for him. He looked at Metella affectionately, for he was very fond of her, and said, 'Yes, perhaps that could be managed. They may not much like giving the girl up — they're that sort of people — but under the circumstances they couldn't refuse. After all, they would be keeping her in the family, wouldn't they?'

Publius looked keenly at Metella, but she merely said — 'I want the girl before they hurt her again or sell her. I can't leave her there. I would like to fetch her away to-day.'

'My dear child,' said her father, 'we'll get the girl for you — you can trust me. I want you to trust me now about another matter. That was what I wanted to tell you, Metella. I have decided to betroth you to Aulus Cornelius.'

Metella was silent for a few seconds. Then she smiled at him. 'They were hinting at that — I mean at Aelia Memmia's — this morning. But I'm afraid it's impossible, father. You are always very good to me and I would like to please you. But, you know, I'm going to marry Lucius Paetus.'

Publius nodded gently. He admired his daughter's spirit. He did not want, if he could avoid it, to exercise his legal powers over her. He meant to persuade her that, out of his wisdom, he was making the right choice for her, and that she would recognize

it later if not now. Nor did he intend to make the mistake of disparaging Lucius Paetus.

'My dear, I know you like Lucius, but you certainly don't dislike Aulus. . . .'

'I don't trust him and I love Lucius.'

'I have nothing at all against Lucius, Metella. I don't mind his not being of very good family. Before long the Knights and the freedmen between them will rule Rome. Caesar has need of them, perhaps to use against his rivals, the old houses of Rome. Lucius Paetus may be one of our rulers some day — he's a nice lad, hard-working and honourable, if a bit serious.'

'Yes, isn't he?' Metella's eyes sparkled with laughter. 'Isn't he solemn sometimes? You ought to like him, father. He's full of the Roman dignity you talk so much about, even if he's not a Senator.' Lucius would have kissed her had he heard her loving laugh.

'Why, yes, my dear.' Her father's eyes twinkled. 'I do like him very much. For some things I like him better than — well, I like both of them very much. But, Metella, you mustn't trust to a perhaps hasty personal liking. Marriage is a serious business. You must look all round it. You have to think of the future. You know that Aulus's father and mother are related to Sejanus —'

'I'm not marrying them, father.'

'Now this morning,' said Publius, ignoring the interruption, 'I have heard a most important piece of news —'

'You have heard,' said his daughter, 'that Caesar has at last promised that Sejanus shall marry his niece Livilla. Thus Sejanus is certain to succeed the Emperor. Gaius Caligula will then be proved guilty of treason or forced to commit suicide or murdered —'

'Hush, child. You mustn't say these things. It's dangerous.'

'— while Sejanus invades Britain, proves himself a greater general than Julius Caesar by conquering the nasty little island, and provides a place on his staff, and a handsome start in life, for his kinsman Aulus Cornelius, whom I am supposed to marry but unfortunately cannot, having decided to marry Lucius. Correct, father?'

Publius, who at first had been a little taken aback, explained

patiently. He said that he had no desire to force Metella. But if Sejanus was actually to become Emperor, and there was now no doubt about this, it altered everything. Sextus Cornelius and his wife would stand close to him. They and their son might soon be among the most powerful in the State; there was almost no greatness that would not be open to them. And it wasn't only that Sejanus might resent any refusal of Publius to gratify his relatives by the marriage; Publius believed that Aulus had already set his father on to interest Sejanus in his desire to marry Metella, and they might soon hear more of that. Metella must see that for a reasonable girl there was no choice.

'Then I'm not reasonable,' said Metella. 'I'm not concerned about Emperors and Sejanuses and Britain and staff-posts. I want Lucius.'

'You must think it over, my dear, and we'll talk again about it. But, Metella, before you go — you shouldn't be so scornful about Britain. You're too intelligent not to understand. We must have a Great Rome, a Greater Rome. Sooner or later we must have that island. We must find a frontier at which we can stop with safety.'

'No general ever believes that he has found a safe frontier, father. They'll always discover that someone threatens from the other side even if they have to put him there themselves.'

'I must make a public speech about it soon,' said Publius. 'Before Sextus Cornelius can make one, as he certainly will. The Britannic danger: how to remove it.' He became animated. 'Provocations of the Britons. A refuge for rebellious Gauls. An aggressive people. Opportunity for Rome to spread her culture. Roads, water — aqueducts, of course — drains, law, discipline, order, a pure religion. Must not shrink from the burden, although no reward. Not an ounce of gold or silver there, as the great Roman senator, Cicero, said to his friend Trebatius. Rome's duty to spare the conquered and wear down the proud. A great civilizing mission. Problem to find the man great enough for the task. Rome always able to find the man. Short eulogy on Caesar. The man already there — who is he, then? — Caesar himself or Sejanus the next Caesar — according to the circumstances of the moment when the speech is made. Ah, here's your mother. I must tell her what I have been saying to you. Think

it over, my dear, and we'll talk about it again. Where are you going now?"

"To tell Lucius that I'm going to marry him," said Metella. "He's waiting for me in my room."

Metella's mother, Caecilia, was a small, quick-witted, lively woman who had no love for the city of Rome or its politics. She preferred the house and farm on the coast fifty miles north of Rome which she had inherited from her parents. She disliked Rome; the hustling crowds, the noise by night and by day, the incessant street-cries, the bawling of the barbers, the sausage-sellers and the pastry cooks, the itinerant musicians, the beggars. She appreciated the adroitness with which her husband had avoided trouble, but she thought little of the Senate or of Senators. Who but the Senate were to blame if Italy had been torn by the long, cruel years of civil war and had lost so much of its best manhood! It was a good thing, she thought, that Julius Caesar had conquered his enemies, that Augustus had at last established a Roman peace, and that Tiberius Caesar ruled the Empire so well. She wished that there was a dynasty so that peace might be secure. But now that no one knew who would succeed Tiberius, and report named Sejanus, she thought that anarchy would return and civil strife and bloodshed, for the supreme power that one man had seized others would covet; others would think they deserved it as well as any man; others would fight for it.

"What is your news, Publius?" she said. "But I can guess. Caesar has said at last that Sejanus is to succeed him?"

Publius was a little hurt. He had news, and twice he had been forestalled. "Not quite that, Caecilia. But it is settled. Sejanus is to marry Livilla."

"She is a whore," Caecilia spoke with composure. "She was sleeping with him even before her husband died, and I'd like to know what he died of, too."

"My dear, you really must not say such things. It is most dangerous. I've just been warning Metella —"

"Metella — why, what's the girl been saying now?"

"Some reckless nonsense — that if Sejanus succeeds Caesar, Gaius Caligula will be tried for treason or put to death or will commit suicide —"

'He will if he's any sense.'

'My dear, I don't know what sort of world you women live in when you say such things. Oh, I know you don't say them to anyone else. At least *you* don't, but I'm not so sure about Metella. She's impetuous, she cares for nobody. It'll be a good thing when she marries.' He eyed his wife cautiously. 'This news should help us to settle it.'

'Us?' Caecilia's eyebrows rose. She and her husband did not agree about Metella. She had explained to him before now that Lucius Paetus was all the more desirable as a husband because he was not of noble birth nor of Senatorial stock nor dangerously rich nor looking to politics as his career, but only a conscientious minor secretary in Caesar's service. Her husband had in turn pointed out to her the advantages which Metella would obtain by marrying into the rich and powerful family of Sextus Cornelius and lately he had added that what was in any case desirable had become necessary, now that Sejanus was so much the favourite. He now, after they had once more gone over the old ground, produced a final argument. 'Sejanus will be Emperor. Nothing can stop it. If that happens, he will order me to give Metella to Aulus and I could not refuse. You know that, Caecilia, as well as I do. He will probably ask it of me now at any moment. Sextus and his son will see to that. If I refuse, we are destroyed; if not soon, then a little later. I would not do it,' he ended, 'if I believed that it would make Metella permanently unhappy. But she does not dislike Aulus —'

'She distrusts him,' said Caecilia, 'and so do I. He will never make her happy. He's cold and he's selfish —'

'Oh, nonsense, my dear. If she has known him all her life and likes him well enough, he can't be so bad, and very likely she will come to love him too when she knows him better. Such things happen.'

'Publius,' said his wife impatiently, 'don't you understand that Metella loves Lucius, and won't marry anyone else?'

'I think she will, when she has thought it over. She's sensible. You know, my dear, this matter is really like an affair of State, with a marriage contract between the party of Sejanus, the future Emperor, on the one hand, and our family on the other. Personal prejudices must not be allowed to interfere with broader considerations of policy.'

'So they say in the Senate, I'm sure,' said Caecilia, 'but this is not the Senate. There's something else, Publius, I wanted to tell you. I've had a dream.'

'About Metella being betrothed, you mean?'

'Yes, and if I'm right about the meaning, it's serious.'

'Dreams are always serious,' Publius said. 'They always have great significance, if we only knew what it was. The difficulty is to know.'

'Yes, Publius. Last year I thought we ought to go to Baiae for a change in the spring, but you wanted to go to Sirmio on Lake Benacus. Then in a dream you saw the spirit of the lake beckoning you to Sirmio. So we went there. I sprained my ankle on the second day and you were in bed all the time with a bad throat.'

'That was only because I interpreted the dream wrongly. I wasn't skilled enough. It is not a job for anyone. It must have been the spirit of Baiae that appeared to me, only I didn't recognize it. If we had employed a professional soothsayer he would have kept us right. These things aren't as simple as they look. But what was your dream, Caecilia?' Publius was longing to interpret.

'I was in the amphitheatre,' said Caecilia. 'There were two men fighting. Each of them had the head of a lion. There were tens of thousands of spectators and behind them I saw the dim shapes of those who founded Rome. The Emperor's box was crowded. He himself was there, but he was a shrunken little figure beside the others in the box. They were the gods and they had with them Julius Caesar — Divus Julius — and Divus Augustus, the latest gods. Juppiter himself was presiding.'

'The gods!' said Publius. 'How did you know?'

'We all knew. It was part of the dream that they were the gods. No one needs to tell you in a dream. You just know. They were quarrelling. Near Juno there was almost a riot. I think she was beating Venus.'

Publius nodded. 'It sounds like the gods, Caecilia. This is a great difficulty for the young nowadays. I heard Metella saying the other day that our conception of the gods is based on the lower forms of family life known to the Greeks and Romans. The young are sceptical. Now, how about the dream?'

'Well, the two men were in armour, and they were fighting with swords and daggers. One was shortish and broad, an active,

lively man. The other was tall and deadly pale, with long, thin legs and a huge heavy body too big for them. I was sure I knew them. Then the tall one, who had the longer reach, struck the other on the head, so that he sank to the ground. The tall man bent over him, looking to the Emperor's box to be told whether he should kill or spare. Then I noticed Tiberius Caesar. He was shaking as though he had a violent fever. The gods were all shouting at one another, some being for death and some for mercy. Then Juppiter looked at Caesar, who was trembling pitiably, laughed and turned his thumbs up, the signal for death. The tall man raised his arm to deal the blow and, as he dealt it, he stumbled and his lion-head fell off. He was Gaius Caligula. The other I suddenly knew through his lion-head. I could tell him plainly through the mask. He was Sejanus.'

'I recognized them from your description of their bodies,' said Publius. 'A remarkably interesting dream, I must say. I congratulate you, Caecilia. It hangs together. What next?'

'The gods were all laughing. Gaius advanced towards the box as though to enter it and the gods laughed louder still. Then the scene changed. Suddenly there were two people again fighting in the arena. They also had lion-heads. This time I knew one. It was Gaius. He was fighting a strange-looking man, who shambled along with his knees almost giving way under him and his lion-head wagging from side to side, almost as though he were a half-wit. Everyone was laughing at him, especially the gods. I didn't know this man.'

'Of course you did,' said Publius. 'Everyone knows him. It was the Emperor's nephew, Claudius, the butt of everyone, especially in his own family.'

'I didn't know him in the dream,' Caecilia said. 'I'm telling you the dream as I had it. And then, suddenly, Gaius was down and his enemy was waiting for Juppiter's decision. He was for killing and so were all the other gods. So were the spectators; they were howling for Gaius's death. Tiberius Caesar took no interest in it at all, but once he suddenly buried his face in his hands as though he could not look on at it any more. And then the same thing happened as before. The shambling creature raised his arm to strike, then he stumbled and his lion-head fell off. I don't know whether he actually struck the other or not.'

After all the excitement he was dribbling at the mouth and his nose was dripping. Yes, it was Claudius. He sat down beside the three Caesars, who seemed contemptuous.'

'So, I should think, did the gods.'

'Not all of them. Venus put her arms round Claudius and petted him. Then they laughed still more.'

'"Unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed Gods",' said Publius. 'And well it might, but really, Caecilia, you can't make anything of a dream in which Claudius of all people became Emperor. That's a joke, not a serious dream.'

'It is serious. I saw in my dream Sejanus killed and Gaius conquering with the approval of the gods. I care nothing about Gaius and Claudius, but I saw Sejanus killed.'

'You're not quite sure, you know. You saw the arm raised to strike him but no more. And if it wasn't true about Claudius, and it can't be, it need not be true about Sejanus either. Besides, Caecilia, I have had signs that point the other way—significant signs.'

Caecilia looked warily at him. 'Not a dream, Publius?' she asked. 'Not a dream showing Sejanus killing Gaius and being embraced by Juno?'

'No dream, but certainly a sign. It's simple. Last night, a very dark night, I was passing Sejanus's house on my way home. Just as I reached the porch there was a fierce flash of lightning coming down, as it seemed, over the house: By its light I suddenly saw some oak leaves lying on the ground. They lay in the shape of a chaplet such as a victorious General wears when he celebrates a triumph. It was just as though they had been deliberately arranged by some mysterious hand. I went on and as I approached the statue of Sejanus near the Forum there was another lightning flash right over it and illuminating it in front of me. In a few minutes I reached this house, and, as I did so, believe me there was a third lightning flash and by its glare I saw there, lying in the doorway, the same leaves, arranged in the same fashion, like a chaplet of victory. I draw the inference that victory is with Sejanus and that victory will come to us—to Metella and Aulus after they are married—from the fortunes of Sejanus, just as the chaplet was transported to our house from his and disclosed to me twice by divine illumination.'

They could not reach agreement, Caecilia insisting that she had seen Sejanus killed and Publius that the oak leaves carried a promise from Sejanus's house to his. 'We must,' said Publius, 'get in an interpreter; an astrologer or soothsayer, an independent man. We shall state the problem to him — whether Sejanus's future is so certain that we must betroth Metella to his relative, what is the meaning of my oak leaves and your dream, and what the stars have to say. Whom shall we commission, then? Perhaps Medon?'

'Not Medon!' said Caecilia firmly. 'I well remember that he told you Scorpus would win that race last year, and you backed Scorpus yourself. Actually he came in last because the famous horse Felix, though he started, would only trot — most humiliating! Medon ought to have repaid your losses.'

'That's unjust, my dear. He told me of his own free will that his first decision was doubtful and that Scorpus might not even start. But by that time I had wagered my money, and so I lost it. Whom do you recommend?'

'I should have Nestor of Ephesus. We know him well.'

'I know him well. It was he who told me that if I but lent my friend Attius the capital to build the amphitheatre at Praeneste I should recover it tenfold. What happened? The contractors, unknown to Attius (so he said) put in a lot of shoddy work. Too little stone and too much wood — the whole thing buckled under the pressure of the crowds who thronged it when it first was opened, scores of them were killed, Attius was exiled, and I lost my money. I lost some credit, too.'

They decided that they must employ an independent, well-reputed soothsayer, whom neither of them had consulted before. When they realized that they could not agree who it should be they decided to take the advice of the two principal slaves of the household, Thyrsus and Pericles. Thyrsus managed his master's accounts, for Publius had not only a mansion in Rome but farms and villas in several parts of Italy. Pericles had the oversight of all the general business of his master and mistress; he was also librarian. Both of them were treated as confidential servants rather than as slaves; indeed, almost as friends. Publius was often urged by his wife and daughter to free them both and he as often announced that he would, but he put off the final act.

Thyrsus, who was thirty years old, was reputed to be of mixed Greek and Asiatic origin. Of his early life nothing was known. He evaded questions, but now and then, when he was in a merry mood, he would tell glittering stories about his birth and early days. He had been a king in Syria, he used to say, or, if not a king, at least the son of a king. His father had unfortunately quarrelled with a neighbour and the Romans had put him down, as they put everyone down one way or another. Then, kidnapped, he had been sold. His name had not been Thyrsus then. He was not sure what it had been; Artavasdes or Radamisthus or something grand like that. Later on he had merely been 'Boy!' to his master, but in his teens something had happened to him. He had been seen drunk, roystering about and brandishing a staff, so that it was like the 'thyrsus', the wand, which Bacchus and his followers flourished in their revels. His master, he said, called him Thyrsus from that day. There was no particular reason why his hearers should either believe or disbelieve his fine stories. Such things happened; the slave-world included men and women whose catastrophes would have been incredible had they not happened. In the house of his first master in Rome, Thyrsus had shown himself as supple as he was industrious. He behaved like a man who, escaping from dreadful shipwreck, meant to make his life secure. He was liked by visitors to the great house, including Publius, who finally secured him in payment for a debt. In Publius's household he was affable among equals and respectful to superiors. Publius made him assistant to the freedman who managed his finances (and whom he had freed as a reward for his efficiency) and when, soon afterwards, Thyrsus exposed his superior's defalcations, gave him the post. Thyrsus was a big, bustling man, with a large, round, white face and a smile for everybody. He was much praised for his sincerity.

Pericles was of about the same age, a tall well-made man, with a grave, intelligent face. He was a Greek, a native of Philae in Upper Egypt. For several years, when he was a boy, Philae had contumaciously failed to pay its taxes, having nothing to pay with owing to bad harvests. Then after the inhabitants had killed one or two tax collectors, the soldiers came. Pericles could remember how they combed the streets, collecting the inhabitants to be sold as slaves. He was fifteen years old at the time. He had the good

fortune to be bought by a priest at Alexandria, who employed him in his library. There he read much. Alexandria was the chief centre of letters and learning in Egypt and Pericles consorted constantly with those who shared his tastes.

When, some years before, this new slave had arrived, Publius had been amused because he was called Pericles. He had been disposed to laugh at a slave bearing the magnificent name, but he liked the look of him.

'How did you get that fine name, my man? Did your master revere the great Athenian?'

'No, sir,' Pericles had answered. 'I had no master then. I was freeborn and lived with my father and mother at Philae on the Nile. My mother called me Pericles after my great-uncle. He was rich, and my mother, who was his favourite, hoped that he would leave me his money. He had made a fortune by supplying, or rather not supplying, the corn that was needed to feed the Roman people. More than once, when the harvest was bad, he and his friends cornered the crop. There was some rioting in Italy but they made a great profit. He died when I was about twelve years old, eighteen years ago.'

'And he left you his money?'

'No, sir. He made a will in favour of his illegitimate children. No one knew about them till he died; he was always reserved. There were certainly four of them, sir, and possibly five. My mother was so agitated by his deception that she did not always give the same figures. You see, sir, being so set on pleasing him, she had spent much money in sending pretty girls to sing and dance and play to him. They became the mothers of his children. It had never occurred to my mother that he would be so unrestrained. Herself a severe woman, she would have been satisfied with the intellectual pleasures and thought that he would, too. But not so my great-uncle.'

'There was evidence of that,' said Publius, with a judicial nod.

'She found it very trying, sir.'

'Oh, quite — but tell me — the little bastards got the money?'

'There was no money, sir. In the last years of his life my great-uncle reformed. He lived virtuously, gave up gambling, wine and women — I should mention that prolonged illnesses had somewhat exhausted him — and for this he won credit with the com-

munity. When he died it was found that he had had little to leave. He had given everything away in advance to the Temple of Chastity. After his debts had been paid there was not enough left even to give him a good funeral. The priests, however, saw to that. There was a generous ceremonial, but my mother could not forgive. Insisting that my great-uncle had sacrificed duty to caprice and dignity to playfulness, she refused to attend. At the funeral the disappointed mothers of the children made a scene. The priests were visibly shocked.'

'Was it not possible,' asked Publius, 'to recover at least part of the money he had given away? On the ground, say, that he was mad or that the priests had engineered a fraud?'

'They knew their business, sir. They announced that my great-uncle had instructed them to pay to the Chief Magistrate of the city one-twentieth of his gifts. Besides, the Chief Priest's daughter was the Chief Magistrate's mistress. Nothing could be done, sir.'

'Still, I should have thought,' said Publius, 'that when the soldiers were sent, their commander would have forced the Temple officials to hand over at least part of your great-uncle's extraordinary benefactions.'

'One would have thought so, sir. But the Chief Priest's daughter was as hospitable to the commander as she had been to the Chief Magistrate. In justice to her, I should say that the Chief Magistrate had by that time made other arrangements. She even entertained the commander in the Temple of Chastity, sir. It aroused comment.'

'People will talk so,' said Publius. 'However, all this happened a long time ago and it must have been very painful to you, but I can understand your recalling it. You will not know it, Pericles, but our national poet Virgil actually says with regard to one's past sufferings —'

'That it gives us positive pleasure to recollect them? Yes, sir, I remember the passage. And, if I may mention it, sir, there is also a letter that the famous Cicero wrote to the historian Lucceius begging to be praised openly and lavishly for the sufferings he had undergone — a strange weakness in such a great man as Cicero, if I may say so. Cicero there says, sir, that the placid recollection of past griefs has its own delight, and also that

others, although they only look on, take a pleasure in their pity. If I am not presumptuous, sir.'

Publius had never before had a slave who could talk with him genially about the books and authors that he loved. The more he found that Pericles shared his joys in reading, the more he was delighted. In a week he put Pericles in charge of his library. In a month he told his wife that Pericles should, under her orders, take general care of the household affairs. A man with such a mind, such a memory, such a noble taste could not but be efficient in housekeeping duties. Caecilia and Metella, though at first sceptical, soon had as great a liking as Publius for Pericles, even if they were not always as enthusiastic over his knowledge of Greek and Roman letters.

Publius, now summoning Pericles, told him briefly what was to be done. A decision had to be taken about Metella's betrothal. The question was whether she should or should not be betrothed to a relative of Sejanus. That involved another, and a most delicate, question: what had the future in store for Sejanus? He himself had experienced what he regarded as a clear portent: the transportation of the leaves to the accompaniment of lightning from Sejanus's house to his. Surely it must mean that shining success was waiting for Sejanus and for those who allied themselves to him. But his wife had had a queer dream which suggested a different ending. They felt that they must have the help of an astrologer or soothsayer to interpret the omen and the dream, to say whether the stars would or would not bless the marriage of Metella and Aulus — in a word, whether Sejanus was marked out for supreme power. This soothsayer must be a trustworthy man, with a known history, with no breath of scandal, one who could be trusted to hear and not disclose the secrets of noble clients. Pericles was to talk to Thyrsus and then they were together to see their master. The strictest secrecy was to be observed.

No one was better informed about the astrologers and fortune-tellers of Rome than the slaves. They also knew the secrets of the families whom they served. They knew what the relations were between their masters, and not less their mistresses, and the diviners whom they consulted. The slaves had their own clubs and gatherings in which they discussed the doings in their masters' households. They knew all about the astrologers who in the

greatest houses were retained permanently as professional advisers. They gossiped of those who were the women's favourites, those whom the women went to see and those who, being let in by back doors at night, were taken secretly upstairs to see the women. They whispered of others who not only foretold the future but provided for it by supplying their clients with drugs and poisons. They made the acquaintance of all the cheats and impostors who flowed into Rome at this time from the East. They knew also of the astrologers who genuinely believed they 'read the stars' and some of whom were serious students and teachers of philosophy. Of all of them they knew the reputation, and of most the price. Thyrsus knew much more than Pericles, for among the slaves he was a man of the world, sociable, nimble, and highly esteemed by his fellows.

The two consulted for a long time. Pericles was delighted to find Thyrsus serious-minded, fully conscious of the qualities which were essential in the man they sought and determined not to be put off with any second-best. At last they returned to their master. Caecilia was sent for, but Publius refused to have Metella brought. She should certainly, he said, be present, if she desired, when the soothsayer gave his opinion, but it was his and Caecilia's responsibility to choose the man and he could not agree that Metella would be at all likely to assist the choice.

Pericles was the spokesman. Publius had first repeated that he trusted them both to be completely silent about the whole business; they must recommend no one who could not be trusted as completely as themselves. Thyrsus said that their only anxiety was to serve their master and mistress; they well understood that misfortune to the house was theirs also; they were proud of the confidence that was being shown them who were not even freed-men. He added that he had asked Pericles to speak for them both. 'He is a learned man,' said Thyrsus, 'and can spout like Demosthenes.' Publius was charmed by his modesty. Caecilia was pleased that Pericles was to do the talking.

Pericles said that they had felt they could not aim too high in their choice since it was the happiness of their young mistress that was at issue. They would not have hesitated to suggest the famous Thrasyllus himself had he been in Rome.

'Yes,' said Publius, 'but he's probably advising Caesar at this

very moment in Capreae and perhaps about this very point — the future of Sejanus. He's no use to us.'

Thrasyllus was the most prominent astrologer of the time, but he was also an educated man, distinguished as a philosopher, whom Tiberius had taken with him, along with other scholars, when he retired to Capreae. Stories were current in Rome about his difficulties with the suspicious Emperor, who applauded, distrusted and laid traps for him by turn.

'Yes,' said Pericles, 'it is true that Thrasyllus is beyond our reach but we can do the next best thing. We recommend a pupil and friend of his — Parmenio.'

'Parmenio?' repeated Publius. 'I never heard of him. I don't think he can be much good. Do you know of him, my dear?'

'No,' said Caecilia. 'But that proves nothing. They spring up like mushrooms. Though somehow the name seems familiar.'

'It does.' Publius thought hard. 'I quite agree. Now where have we heard it?' Then, 'I've got it. I heard the name at Lucius Vitellius's. He was doing a dangerous thing. He was trying to find out by consulting an astrologer when he was going to be Consul. Yes, I'm certain the name was Parmenio.'

Lucius Vitellius, one of the chief men in the State, was a great friend of Publius and Caecilia. It was thought to be certain that the Emperor would soon nominate him as Consul. 'Go on,' said Publius. 'Tell us about this Parmenio.'

Thyrus respectfully interrupted. 'I think I have heard, sir,' he said, 'that Parmenio advises the noble Lucius Vitellius. His freedmen have mentioned the name, though I know nothing more.'

Publius nodded to Pericles — 'About Parmenio?' he said again.

Parmenio, Pericles explained, was a Greek born in Africa. He had studied first at Alexandria. He had become a great admirer of Thrasyllus, who was lecturing there at that time on the Greek philosophers. A few years later he heard that Thrasyllus was at Rhodes as the friend and adviser of Tiberius, who had then exiled himself from Rome. Parmenio, hastening to Rhodes, had sought the society of his old master, who had now been induced by Tiberius to give the greater part of his time to the study of the stars. Parmenio himself, so Pericles understood, had been well received by Tiberius, so that there were some who thought that if Tiberius grew weary of Thrasyllus, Parmenio might even

ucceeded to the glory of the Emperor's friendship. The reason why so little had been heard of Parmenio was that until the last few months he had stayed in his native city of Alexandria, which he greatly loved, but at last the fame of Rome and a burning desire to perform a wider service among his fellow-men had brought him to the great capital, where, so Pericles thought, he might soon see the rage.

'There is one other thing,' went on Pericles, 'and this is the most remarkable of all. Apollo, the god of oracles, once addressed to Parmenio personally an oracle the like of which has not been known in historical times.'

'What!' said Publius. 'An authenticated oracle directed to Parmenio himself? Where?'

'It was at Memphis in Egypt, sir, at the great temple of Apollo—'

'Apollo!' said Publius, astonished. 'Why, I thought that the famous temple at Memphis was that of Vulcan. There are any number of stories about it. There's one about a priest of Vulcan at Memphis actually becoming King of Egypt—I can't remember where I read it. . . .'

'In Herodotus, sir,' said Pericles, 'if I may presume to say so. The priest became King Sethos. There was a stone statue of him at Vulcan's temple, holding a mouse in his hand. That was because, when he was beset by Sennacherib, King of the Arabians and Assyrians, Vulcan sent in the night a multitude of field-mice who devoured the quivers and the bow-strings of the enemy and the thongs on their shields so that next day the invaders fled, being helpless without arms.'

'What!' said Publius. 'Mice to gnaw the bow-strings! I had forgotten that. A very ingenious device for the god of the hammer! But these things are puzzling. I wonder what the god did with the multitude of mice after the Assyrians fled. It would have been awkward for Sethos if, liking the flavour of bow-strings, quivers and thongs, they had got a taste for those of his army, too.'

'I suppose, sir, that the god who produced an army of mice could equally make them vanish. It would be unknown whence they came and unknown whither they went.'

'Publius,' said Caecilia, severely, 'I thought we were talking about Parmenio. I've got a lot to do to-day.'

'You are quite right, my dear, we were talking about Parmenio. You should know better, Pericles; we really can't discuss that Sethos story to-day. It has some very striking features, though. I'm not sure, you know, that any religion really benefits from extraordinary stories of monstrous actions by the gods.'

'We need not, perhaps, believe them all, sir? When your favourite Horace went to Egnatia on the road to Brundisium he and his friends were told that at the temple there the incense had once melted without the aid of fire. Horace says that they were much amused by the story. So you are in good company, sir, if I may say so.'

'Of course, Pericles! "Let the Jew Apella believe it", says old Horace, "but not me!" He didn't think the gods agitated themselves about such things. But you know, Pericles, what puzzles me is that so many of the most astonishing prodigies are supposed to have occurred in your own country, Egypt. There's that story which says that whenever there's a big fire in Egypt the people just stand about and watch while the cats rush headlong into the flames and are burned to death, whereupon the spectators are filled with grief for them.'

'I don't think that Herodotus says a "big" fire, sir. He says it happened whenever there was a fire.'

'Well, that's stranger still, but does it happen? You come from Egypt and ought to know. Did you ever see a single cat do this? Or know anyone who saw it — with his own eyes, I mean?'

'No, sir, I did not. But in fairness, sir, remember that Herodotus was speaking five hundred years ago. Much may have changed since then. I believe, for instance, that nowadays the Phoenix is only rarely seen in Egypt, though, when it does come, its appearance is so remarkable that all the other birds of the country fly after it in a vast congregation.'

'If I were there,' said Publius, 'I'd be up with them myself. Go on.'

'Well, some of these stories are very reasonable. You will remember that when Hercules visited Egypt the people seized him and decided to sacrifice him to Juppiter. When they put a chaplet on his head and led him out in solemn procession he took it quietly, but when he found them leading him up to the altar and producing the sacrificial knives, he turned and killed them all.

The story may be foolish since among the Egyptians there were no human sacrifices, but when it describes Hercules as deciding that things were going too far, it is surely credible?

'Pericles,' said Caecilia despairingly, 'will you stop distracting your master and get on with your story. Really, Publius, I cannot waste any more time. Are we going to talk about Parmenio or not?'

'Yes, my dear, I know. These things run away with Pericles. Come to the point, Pericles. About Parmenio and the temple of Apollo —'

'Yes, sir. I am sorry, madam. It was entirely my fault. There is a festival at this Memphis temple at which, each year, Apollo utters oracles. Some years ago there were ten thousand people waiting for the voice of the god in the courtyard of the temple. There had been no utterance for some hours when, as it happened, Parmenio, accompanied by a group of his students and followers, male and female, came to the main entrance between the two stone elephants — famous monuments, for they are sixty feet high. He was riding a white horse and, as he came between the elephants, two trumpeters on either side of him blew a loud call. Immediately a resounding voice, clearly heard by the ten thousand worshippers, proclaimed —

'“Hail to thee, Parmenio; speak thou with the voice of Apollo, Wisest of Africa's sons, brave teller —”'

'“Bold,” said Thyrsus.

'“Bold,” said Pericles.

'“Wisest of Africa's sons, bold teller of truth to the Romans.”'

The ten thousand turned, saw who was there and knew that Apollo had chosen Parmenio.'

This clinched the choice for Publius. Even Caecilia was impressed, though disappointed that Pericles had not himself seen the wise man whom he commended. Thyrsus had seen him and said, when questioned, that he was a fine figure of a man, one whose bearing was equal to his reputation. They discussed other names but could find no one who appeared to answer their requirements as well as Parmenio.

'I can't quite see,' said Publius, 'why his having met the Emperor at Rhodes should help him to read the stars, and yet I

think that somehow it makes him better for our purpose. He should be politically wiser. At any rate it gives me confidence.'

Caecilia was not enthusiastic, since she thought that her dream was guidance enough, but if someone had to be consulted, she was ready to agree. Pericles was instructed to see the soothsayer, to inform him in general terms that his advice was needed, to ascertain his fee and to ask him to call on Publius, who would tell him what was necessary and make the final arrangements. Pericles set off at once, Thyrsus with him. At the door of the house in which Parmenio lived a litter was waiting. As they arrived a lady, heavily veiled, came out and got into the litter. Thyrsus whistled. 'Livilla!' he said, naming the Emperor's daughter-in-law. 'I'll swear I know that figure.'

'Is it really? Why, you know everyone,' said Pericles admiringly. 'It shows how important Parmenio is, doesn't it? The master would be pleased if he knew. But not the mistress!'

'Say nothing then!' Thyrsus cautioned him.

Pericles turned into the doorway. Thyrsus walked on quickly to the house of Sextus Cornelius, where he went in and asked for the young master, Aulus.

While Publius and Caecilia were discussing what day and hour they should fix for Parmenio to pronounce his judgment, a slave entered and handed a letter to his master. Publius, having read it, passed it to his wife. 'They lose no time,' he said. 'This is the result of the news from Capreae. They think that all is settled and that they can now get whatever they want. Read it out,' he said to his wife, 'and read slowly, so that I can take it in better.'

It was from Sejanus to Publius. Caecilia read:

'I know, my dear Publius, that my kinsman Sextus Cornelius Flaccus desires to betroth his son Aulus to your daughter Metella. I wish to assure you that nothing could be more agreeable to me. I am happy to think that your friendship for me is so strong that you will take my views — I might say even my desires — into account.

'I have cause to think, and to-day I have more cause than ever before, that I may be able to assist my young kinsman powerfully in his career, thereby raising your daughter to that position which her intelligence and charm richly deserve. Do me, I beg

of you, this favour and our friendship will be closer, if that is possible, than it has ever been.

'Take care to keep well, for if you are well, so also am I.'

'"If that is possible!"' said Publius. 'I've never been very friendly with him. He's as oily as dear old Cicero when he was wanting a favour, but one could forgive Cicero.'

Caecilia shrugged her shoulders — 'I saw the other one kill Sejanus,' she said.

'He's alive enough, now, Caecilia. Well, we must see what Parmenio says, that's all.'

'He may refuse to come.'

'Then he'll be the first Greek to refuse good money. Pericles will bring him. No one could resist Pericles. Tell Metella what we're doing, Caecilia. She'll be angry, but what can we do? Look at that letter! I don't like it, you know. I don't like it, but I'm afraid of refusing, that's the truth. And so would anyone else be. It's a bad time Rome's coming to, Caecilia. We've had sixty years of peace and prosperity, thanks to Augustus Caesar and our Tiberius Caesar, but when one man is ruler you can't guarantee that the next one will be good. And why should anyone accept him who can destroy him and take his place? If Sejanus becomes Emperor, what will keep him in his seat? The army that he pays! And what will unseat him? A larger army which someone has paid better. You'll see. Well, let Metella know.' He picked up his book again.

Metella, on leaving her father, had gone to join Lucius in her own room. Here, too, there were paintings in panels on the walls, but the subjects were taken from Greek legends. Here was the girl Nausicaa, like the immortal goddesses in form and comeliness, playing by the sea-shore, and no whit frightened by the sight of the sea-battered Ulysses. Here was Penelope as she came down into the hall to the suitors, with a faithful handmaid on either side of her and holding before her face her shining veil. And here was Helen as she entered Troy for the first time, when the Trojans crowded the battlements to see her and some drew in their breath sharply because she was so lovely, and others cried out in loud delight, while here and there some stirred uneasily as they felt a coldness strike them and wondered what

price they and their wives and children would some day pay for the coming of lovely Helen. On the small wall by the side of the door was a painting of Iris, the fleet of foot, the messenger of the immortal gods, all dewy with her saffron wings.

Metella had told Lucius what her father had said. The news was not unexpected. It was no secret that Aulus had long wanted to marry Metella, that he was often at her house and that his father, though full of arrogance, and his mother, though an ambitious woman who thought nothing good enough for her son, would both help him to secure his desire. Lucius was bitter. This, he said, was to befall him because of his humble birth, modest means and lack of powerful friends. But he would not give Metella up to Aulus for any Sejanus, not even if he were ten times Emperor. Not, that is, unless she wanted him to give her up — did she want him to give her up, after all? Perhaps it would be better for her if he did. 'You will be a great lady, you will be near the new Emperor, your husband will be his favourite, you will be better off all round than as the wife of a poor official.'

'And I shall also,' said Metella, 'be extremely angry with the poor foolish official unless he talks sensibly. Whatever happens I'm not going to marry Aulus.'

'How will you stop it?'

'I don't know. Perhaps I'll out-argue father. Or coax him — he's often coaxable. Or find better quotations than he can. I might get some from Pericles: he's got lots to spare. It doesn't help for us to be too solemn. The trouble is that father's always frightened about the family's future, and then he thinks that he's very foreseeing, which is a pity as he's usually wrong. Or perhaps we can find out some dreadful scandal about Aulus, or make one up — but I should have to do that because you're too honest and would be miserable until you'd confessed. I tell you once again, I will not marry Aulus and I intend to marry you. I don't know yet how to do it but I'll do it. Mother's on my side, too. For the present I shall just go on saying "No! No! No!" in the hope that they'll get tired of me. If they don't there will be what the Senate calls a "deadlock" and no one to "resolve" it. Everything according to the best political models! And now —' she sprang up, took a book from the table and sat down close to him, 'I'm going to read you a nice poem from Catullus.'

'I don't like Catullus. I want to kiss you.'

'Well, who can give us better advice about that than Catullus? Listen, Lucius. He's speaking to his sweetheart Lesbia — you know, the famous Clodia.'

'The infamous Clodia, you mean. We all know what sort of woman she was — "Quadrantaria", one of her lovers called her, the woman "whose price was a penny". Why, she accused that one of trying to murder her — and I don't wonder if he did — and she was herself accused of having murdered her husband.'

'Maybe, but that's only History. It doesn't make Catullus's verses about love any the worse. He didn't see her that way, at least not when he wrote this poem, whatever he thought later. What does it matter what the woman was like, anyway? It's what Catullus said and how he said it that concerns us. Now listen, Lucius, and learn.' The she read —

'Let us live, my Lesbia, and love, and value at
a farthing all the idle talk of sour old men.

Suns may set and come again, but we, when the
brief light has once set, must sleep through
one unending night.

Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
then a second thousand, then another hundred,
then yet another thousand, and a hundred.

Then, when we have heaped up many thousands,
we will mix them together, that we may not know
how many there have been, and that no evil
person may look on jealously, when he knows
that we have had so many kisses.'

With that she put her arms about him and kissed his cheeks and mouth. Then saying, 'Catullus had more time than we have — at present,' she pulled him to his feet and bade him come back soon. 'But not to-morrow morning. Aulus is coming to tell me whether they are going to let me have the slave-girl Iris. They had better!'

'He'll bargain with you, Metella. You'll see.'

'Let him look out for himself then! Now you must go.' She took him by the arm and led him to the door. 'Lucius, if you can't sleep, say to yourself, "She doesn't know how she'll do it but she will not marry Aulus. Neither Publius Antonius nor all the Cornelians put together, nor Sejanus, nor the Emperor himself, nor the very latest wild beasts from Africa can make her, because she will not do it. She intends to marry me. She — intends — to — marry — me".'

'I shall keep awake, Metella, all the night to say it.'

CHAPTER IV

NEXT morning Aulus came to see Metella. He was confident, rather jaunty, like a player who cannot conceal that he is pleased with his cards. Metella, having bidden him sit down, at once said, 'What about Iris? Have you settled it? Will she come to-day?'

He smiled and said, 'Always impetuous! You think I ought to have brought her with me, don't you? By the way, has your father had a letter from Sejanus?'

'Not that I know of; if he has, he has not told me. If he has, what would it be about? Oh, I see what you mean — do you mean, written about us?'

'About us, yes! He was going to. He likes you, you know, and he takes a great interest in us. I think his letter must have come.'

'I don't know, Aulus. I've not heard of it. But tell me about Iris, is it all settled, and when will she come to me?' She was full of impatience.

He fixed his eyes on her boldly, as if tasting the time when she would be his. There was passion in it, and arrogance, and a touch of contempt. It was as if he were saying, 'You can do what you like; you will be mine all the same.' Aloud he said, 'The parents are being troublesome. They think she is being rewarded for giving herself airs, and they disapprove. They're very serious people. Of course, I could persuade them — ' he regarded her closely — 'if you would only say at last that you agree — '

For a moment her face had stiffened but she was cheerful now,

though watchful, and her tone was light. 'Agree to what, Aulus? Out with it!'

'To become one of the family. And then, you see, the girl would remain in the family, and so would not be rewarded.'

'So that we could still ill-treat her if we chose? I think that if I marry you, I'll do it for your own sake and not to enter your family. But, Aulus, it sounds as though you were trying to strike a bargain with me.'

'No, not at all. I'm stating a fact. I'm doing my best to release the girl but you don't give me any help.' He waited some seconds. 'You should give me some encouragement, then it would be simple. But if you won't, then I'm afraid' — he shrugged his shoulders — 'it may be difficult.'

'You *are* exacting this morning, Aulus. I should be afraid of you as a husband; you would always be wanting something for something.' He shook his head and laughed and was as cold as ever. 'And I was so pleased with you when you came. I was going to be nice to you — and I still want to be if you'll let me. But you mustn't spoil it by trying to bargain with me — that's not fair.' She pointed suddenly to the roll of Catullus. 'I tell you what. I'll read you a little poem from Catullus. That'll be encouragement for you.'

'I don't like poetry, I don't like Catullus, I only know two lines of him, and they're horrible, though they're true enough, Heaven knows.'

'I didn't know you knew any. What are they?'

'Never mind. I'm not going to tell you.'

'Well, have they anything to do with us — with me and you?'

'With you and me, yes. But I'm not-going to tell you. It might give you too much satisfaction. Some day, perhaps.'

'Very unkind, and most mysterious! I wish you'd tell me. But I'm going to read you this poem. You'll see, it will be encouragement for you.'

'I don't want encouragement from Catullus, but from you.'

'That's because, being very ignorant, you don't know the poem. Now listen. Catullus is talking to his sweetheart Lesbia — you know, the famous Clodia.'

She began to read the same poem that she had read to Lucius: 'Let us live, my Lesbia, and love.' After a few lines, for a fraction

of a second she paused. She glanced at Aulus with a suggestion of a smile and the slightest inquiring lift of the eyebrows. He made as if to move towards her but she sat upright and was reading again. As she finished, she looked at him demurely over the top of the book. In a moment he brushed it away and kissed her. She jumped up. 'Ah! the man of action!' she said, 'who despises poetry!' He was approaching her again. 'No more,' she said, 'at present! Catullus had had long practice before he wrote that poem. And besides, you wouldn't have me act like the abandoned Clodia, would you? You know the sort of woman *she* was. "Quadrantaria" — the woman "whose price was a penny" — that's what one of her lovers called her. You only said you wanted encouragement, you know.'

He regarded her sullenly. 'Are you giving me a little encouragement in order to persuade me to release the girl? Who's bargaining, I wonder? Well, see here. There's no reason why she shouldn't go to you. But there's also no reason why I should put myself to trouble about her unless you claim the right to ask that, or anything else, of me. So you can let me know whether you do. If you say you do, you can have Iris or anything or anyone else that is in my power to give. But otherwise, no!' With that he nodded at her, repeated 'Let me know,' and went.

'So,' she thought, 'I am to encourage him with kisses or lose Iris. I am to promise to marry him or the girl will be publicly sold with the job lots. And, if I promised and she came to me, then, after I had married him, he and his family would do what they liked with her and I could not prevent them.' Well, she would rescue Iris whatever it might cost her. It would be Aulus's own fault if he was deceived. He was forcing her to sell herself to him in order to buy Iris, and he liked doing it. He thought that he had her in his power, but he would see. If he had no scruples, neither need she have any. She owed him nothing. Let him look after himself. She would buy Iris from him and she would marry Lucius Paetus, too. She took her writing tablets and wrote a letter to him —

'You should not be angry with me, my Aulus, because I do not please you in everything, for if you are angry with me now when you see me so little, how will you bear with me in the

future when day by day you discover all my faults? I am sure you do not want to bargain with me, nor, certainly, do I with you. Between you and me, for I know what you feel about me, there should be only trust. I assure you, then, that I want to make you happy and I shall know how to be grateful.'

She read the letter over thoughtfully. He was suspicious of her and she wondered whether the implication at the end was clear enough. If not, the letter would make things worse, perhaps much worse; he would be furious. She had better be thorough, make no mistake about it. Writing the letter again, she altered the end so that it read —

'And I shall know how to be as grateful as you could yourself desire.'

That committed her, true enough, but she would leave nothing to chance.

An hour later Thyrsus was on his way to deliver the letter.

Metella made a grimace. She wondered whether Aulus, if he met Lucius, might not hint at what was happening in order to torment him. But it was idle to worry about that. If it happened, she would put it right. She must see her father now to find out about this business of a letter from Sejanus and also to persuade him without delay to ask for Iris.

Publius was delighted to do what she asked. He wanted to please her while his decision about her betrothal had time to sink into her mind; she would eventually, he hoped, become used to the idea. He told her it was true that Sejanus had written to him about her marrying Aulus, but he implied that it was nothing very serious. It added nothing, he said, to what they already knew; she need not worry about it. He would take up the matter of Iris at once, and indeed he did, so that in twenty-four hours the formalities had been completed and Iris belonged to the household of Publius. When she was about to start for her new home she was told that 'the young master', Aulus, wanted to see her. He told her that she was going to a new mistress whom he was shortly to marry. If, in attending on her mistress, she heard or saw anything that he ought, or would like, to know, she was to keep him informed. She should remember, he said, that after

he married Metella she would be a member of the household of which he was the master. She should do exactly what he told her; if she did not, it might be impossible to let her remain with Metella. Did she understand? She said yes, with eyes fixed on him and lips hardly moving, and he told her to go. He wondered whether she was sullen or only frightened, and decided that when he had married Metella he would get rid of her. Slaves who were devoted to their mistress were known to be inconvenient to their master.

When the girl arrived at the house of Publius Antonius she was taken to Metella's room. Metella, having told her of her duties, remembered the painting on the wall and, pointing to it, said, 'Your namesake!' Then, seeing that the girl did not understand, she added, 'It is Iris, the swift messenger of the gods, the golden-winged, herself a goddess.' The Jewess, however, regarded the painting of the Gentile goddess with complete indifference, and said simply —

'They call me Iris, but it is not my name. My name is Judith, but they will not let us keep our Jewish names. My mother told me always to go to the synagogue, to listen to our sacred writings and never to forget that she had given me Judith for a name. She told me always to remember who Judith was and what she did. I have never forgotten.'

Judith's father, Joseph, and her mother Miriam, lived in a village on the coast of Judaea not far from Joppa. When she was ten years old, it was raided at night by slave-dealers. The inhabitants were hustled into boats and then to a ship off shore, which was already crowded. Night by night other captives were thrust in among them. Day after day the slavers went among the packed mass and made room for newcomers by throwing overboard the old, the sick and those who had been severely injured. For days the prisoners remained herded together, ill-fed and with foul water to drink, cowed by the whip, while the ship crept northward and west along the coasts until finally it reached Delos, the island which was the great market for the slaves of Greece, the countries north of it, and Asia. On landing the captives were disposed of to dealers, who divided them into sections. Those who were good only for rough labour were at once put up to auction. Those who would fetch better prices —

good-looking women, girls and boys, men who had the signs of intelligence and training — were set aside, washed, groomed and fed in order that they might impress the buyers.

Joseph, a strong young peasant, was sold off with a dozen others and disappeared for ever from his wife and child. He was eventually sent to work on a great estate in Sicily, escaped, was captured and consigned to the quarries, where, being defiant, he soon died of exposure and maltreatment. Miriam was sold with the child to a rich and affable Corinthian merchant. A month later his wife, a secret, aggrieved woman, poisoned her, not because there was ground for jealousy, for which Miriam's virtue gave no cause, but as a reasonable precaution lest an old weakness of her husband should disturb the household peace.

Judith had by this time been named Iris. She was now sold to a contractor at Athens who made cloaks for women. After five years, seeing that she was handsome, intelligent, a cause of quarrel among his three sons and a growing temptation to himself, he disposed of her privately to a trader who was buying boys and girls for the Roman market. At Rome she sold well, for the Roman nobles and the rich vied with each other in their display of handsome slaves. In the household of Sextus and Aelia, Iris soon showed that five years of slavery had not broken her spirit. Only Metella saved her.

'But who,' said Metella, 'was Judith? What did she do? Why did your mother say that you must always remember her?'

When the girl spoke it was as though she was telling a folk-story to brothers and sisters in the Judæan village. 'Judith was a woman of Bethulia, a mountain town in northern Judæa. There are passes there which an enemy must use if he would fall on Judæa from the north. Some of them are so narrow that only two men could march through them abreast. The king of the Assyrians ordered his captain Holofernes to subdue the Jews and destroy Jerusalem. Holofernes came with twelve thousand horsemen and an hundred and seventy thousand footmen, a great multitude. The men of Bethulia went out to hold the passes while Holofernes made ready to take their strong places by assault, spreading so great an army through the land that neither the high mountains, nor the villages, nor the hills could bear their weight. Even so he might have failed, but the ancient enemies

of my people, the sons of Ammon and of Moab who live beyond the Jordan river, came to Holofernes with a plan. They said that he should seize the springs of water which came forth at the foot of the mountains and kept life in Bethulia. Then, sitting down about the place, they would wait for thirst and famine to destroy; before ever the sword came against Bethulia, its people would be overthrown in their own streets. So they seized the springs, and all the army, the footmen, the chariots and the horsemen, camped about the town. After thirty-four days the cisterns of the place were emptied, the young children were out of heart, the women and young men famished for thirst. The people clamoured for surrender, believing it to be better that they should even be made a spoil for the Assyrians than that they should watch their wives and children die. The chief governor of the city, however, persuaded them that they should wait five days in the which time the Lord God might save them. If not, they would surrender. Then came Judith, who was a widow. Her husband, overseeing those that bound the sheaves during the barley harvest, had been struck down by the sun. She herself was beautiful to behold, nor was there any, since she feared God greatly, to give her an evil word. She went to the governors of the city, saying that the people must wait with faith to be saved by the Lord God. She herself that very night would go forth with her waiting-woman and within the five days the Lord God would save the city. She would not tell them what plan she had in mind, but that night she decked herself bravely to attract the eyes of all men that should see her. She gave to her maid wine and oil and a bag of food and together they went forth to the camp of Holofernes. There, wondering at her beauty, our enemies admired the children of Israel that could produce such a woman. When they brought her to Holofernes she flattered him. His fame, she said, had come to them in Bethulia; everywhere it was reported that only he was excellent in all the kingdom, mighty in knowledge, wonderful in feats of war. She begged him to wait now for a few days, for the people of Bethulia meant in their extremity to eat forbidden foods and to consume the corn and wine and oil that were sanctified for the priests at the Temple in Jerusalem. On the day when they committed this sin they would be given over to him to be destroyed. Nay, she herself would lead him in

his triumphant march even to Jerusalem, and all the sons of Israel would be as sheep that had no shepherd and not a dog would so much as bark at him. Delighted by her beauty and her praise, Holofernes agreed to wait. For three days Judith abode in the camp, sleeping in her own tent, eating and drinking only what she had brought with her. On the fourth day Holofernes, making a feast, invited her to it, for he meant to have his way with her. When she came, more than ever ravished with her loveliness, he greatly desired her. He lay on a couch while she sat on soft skins which her maid had laid for her on the ground. He urged her to drink and be merry with him, but she drank only of the liquor which her maid had brought, while he himself drank more wine than he had drunk in one day since he was born. The feast at last came to an end. The servants withdrew from the tent, so that none of them was left, neither little nor great, the door was shut and Judith was left alone with Holofernes. But now he was stretched out along his bed, he was filled with wine, he slept. Then Judith, with a prayer to God, took his own sword. She seized the hair of his head and crying, "Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel this day", she smote twice upon his neck with all her might and took away his head from him. She put his head in the food-bag that she had brought with her and returned to the city, where they hanged the head upon the city wall. In the morning, when the Assyrians found Holofernes lying on the ground without a head, their captains rent their coats, their minds were wonderfully troubled, there was a cry and a great noise throughout the camp. All the footmen and the horsemen, seized with fear, fled in the plain and in the hills, while the children of Israel chased them with a great slaughter. Thereafter the high priest and ancients of Israel that dwelt in Jerusalem came to Bethulia. They said of Judith that she was the exaltation of Jerusalem, the glory of Israel, the great rejoicing of our nation.'

There was a lively colour in the girl's cheeks; she spoke in a low voice, composed and proud. Then she said, 'So my mother called me Judith. I was to have faith always in the Lord our God and never to surrender'. Hesitating for a moment, she added, 'My mother gave me a dagger wherewith to defend myself. I have had it ever since. It is here'. She touched her side.

'You mean you have it there?' asked Metella. 'Show it me.'

Iris put her hand inside her cloak. Through the opening could be seen a piece of coarse string tied round her body; hanging from it was a worn leather sheath containing the dagger. She gave the dagger to Metella. It had a shining blade, two-edged and sharply pointed; the handle was of bone and on either side of it were Hebrew characters; on the one side, so Iris said, were the names 'Joseph, Miriam, Judith', and on the other 'Judith of Bethulia'. Her mother had given it to her one year when the family had gone to a festival that was held in honour of Judith of Bethulia who slew Holofernes by the aid of the Lord God.

'How did you manage to keep the dagger all this time?' said Metella. 'I should have thought that it would have been taken from you.'

'They do not trouble what slaves wear next their skins,' Iris answered, 'and slaves do not tell of one another.'

'They do sometimes. You must beware of other slaves lest they deceive you. There are slaves who spy on their fellows in order to curry favour with their masters or the State. And you are not to use the dagger unless I tell you that you may or unless you are attacked, which is unlikely here. You understand? No one will hurt you while you belong to me. Now you may go.'

Iris did not move. 'There is something more,' she said. 'The young master Aulus Cornelius sent for me when I came here. He said that you were going to marry him.'

'Aulus himself said that? Did he say anything else?'

'Yes, that I was to report to him anything that would interest him about you here, since he was to marry you.' She looked anxiously at Metella. 'Is it true that you are going to marry him?'

'No,' said Metella. 'I'm not. That is certain. I'm going to marry someone quite different. So you were ordered to spy on me?'

'But I would not. I would die sooner than tell him anything about you that you did not want me to. I am glad you will not marry him. I do not like or trust him. None of the slaves does.'

'Nor do I, but they want to make me marry him. I will not. The clever Aulus! He wants to set a spy on me and then he chooses you! My husband must be more intelligent than that.'

Now go, and if some day I am in danger I shall call not "Iris" but "Judith, Judith", and when you hear that name you will know I need your help.'

Iris flung herself to her knees, and, taking Metella's hand, pressed it to her forehead and her breast. Then, saying 'I shall do whatever you will', she hurried away.

Later in the day Pericles and Thyrsus spoke to Iris separately. Metella had commended her to both of them and had also told Pericles the story of her Jewish name. Pericles asked her age and told her that she looked almost as old as Metella, who was the best mistress in all Rome, so that it was not possible to do enough for her. 'She rescued me from this,' said Iris simply, showing her arm where the weals were clear though now less angry. 'You need not fear that here,' said Pericles, 'neither the master nor either of our mistresses is like that unless there is something very bad. You should be happy here.'

Thyrsus, taking an opportunity to speak to her when she was alone, welcomed her like a brother. He was kindly, almost affectionate. He had often seen her, he said, at the house of Sextus Cornelius. The young master had mentioned her — 'he called you "the pretty Jewess"' — and told him to look after her while she was still strange in the house of Publius. Then he told her that she must come to him if she were in any difficulty. He would like to help her. She must confide in him. He had always liked the look of her. He wanted to know more of her. He was sure that he could help her as a friend. When he became a freedman, which would be soon, they would know each other better still. He asked her where she came from. When she said that her old home had been in Judaea he said, 'Judaea? Why, I came from not far off myself!' He told her the story of his royal blood, laughing gently as though at a subtle jest. 'But now I'm just like anyone else. We're all together, aren't we?' He put his arm round her in a friendly, possessive way. Iris looked up sharply for an instant at his large, benevolent, smiling face. He was all affection. 'Don't be afraid of me,' he said, 'I only want to help. Don't forget — you and I must be good friends.' He ran his eyes appraisingly over her as she turned to go away and watched her till she was out of sight. He snapped his fingers, amused, contemptuous, enjoying his thoughts.

CHAPTER V

PARMENIO, whom the oracle of Apollo at Memphis had hailed as the wisest of Africa's sons, showed some reserve when Pericles gave him Publius's message, adding that he should come as soon as possible to hear the question which was to be put to him. He told Pericles to thank Publius and to say that if he should be able to accept the commission, which was doubtful since he had so many engagements, he would call in order to be instructed and to settle the day when he would give his judgment. One of his secretaries would inform Publius of the fee. Pericles gave his master the message, to which Thyrsus added that he did not think Parmenio would be able to come, so busy was he with his clients, so warmly courted, one might almost say besieged, by Roman ladies, so beloved by the plebeian citizens, whom he frequently assisted without charge. Three days passed. Publius thought that he must send Pericles again to Parmenio with an urgent message or go himself, for he was now worried lest he should fail to obtain the services of a man who had been a pupil of Thrasyllus, who was consulted by one of the shrewdest men of that time, Lucius Vitellius, and who had been publicly commended by Apollo, the god of prophecy. On the fourth day Parmenio came. He was a tall, grave, bearded man. In earlier years his long black beard and profound silences had marked him as a man of exceptional wisdom, and when, later on, he became known as an eloquent teacher and seer, his beard invested his speech with the same authority as formerly his silence. He was dressed in a long, dark blue tunic, with a white cloak over it that came to his knees. He wore no ornament except a little gold lion, standing on bars of gold, which was suspended from his neck. This was a copy of the great gold lion which Croesus, the famous king of the Lydians, had sent hundreds of years before to the shrine of Apollo at Delphi. The reason was that only the Delphic oracle had answered truthfully a question which he set. He had decided to test the most renowned of the world's oracles. He sent envoys to all the shrines and instructed them that on the hundredth day after they had left him they should ask each oracle what precisely Croesus, the king of Lydia, was doing at that moment. Then he

set himself to devise something that no one could possibly guess. On the hundredth day he cut up a tortoise and a lamb with his own hands and boiled them in a brazen cauldron with a brazen lid. And on that same day, as soon as his envoys entered the sanctuary at Delphi and even before they could ask their question, Apollo's priestess cried out (using hexameter verse, just as the oracle at Memphis had done to Parmenio) that she could smell the flesh of a tortoise and a lamb boiling in a brazen vessel with a brazen lid. Croesus was deeply moved. He made magnificent presents to the Delphic shrine, among them a large golden lion planted on golden ingots. It was of this that Parmenio carried a replica. Even the most sceptical observer felt that the oracle reported to have been given to Parmenio must have been genuine when they heard that the golden lion of Croesus on his chest contained a copy of it.

Parmenio arrived in a litter carried by four tall Nubians. Two remained by it, two accompanied him as a bodyguard as far as he ordered them. He had with him also two page-boys of about fourteen years of age, chosen for their beauty. He did not disguise his belief that he was the favourite of Apollo. The Nubians wore on their cloaks a clasp representing the tripod on which Apollo's priestess at Delphi sat while announcing the oracles. The pages wore short tunics of gold cloth and on the front of each the letters A, P and Ph were interwoven. Everyone knew that 'Ph' stood for 'Philos' — 'friend' — but after that there were differences of opinion. Most people said that A stood for Apollo and P for Parmenio, so that the letters meant 'Apollo the friend of Parmenio'. Others said that A meant Aletheia (the Greek for 'truth') and that the meaning was 'Parmenio the friend of Truth and Truth Parmenio's friend'. When he himself was asked which was correct he said the meaning was 'Parmenio, loving the Truth, is loved by Apollo'. He let it be understood that the god often appeared to him in the night hours, revealing to him the answers that should be made on the next day to his clients. Many of these were women of rank and wealth who gladly submitted their perplexities and passions to a soothsayer whose sanctity was guaranteed to them by his caressing voice, bold eyes and insinuating touch.

Publius had Caecilia with him. He had offered to instruct

Parmenio without troubling her, but she desired to make her own report of her dream, being anxious not to expose her husband's impartiality to too severe a trial. When Parmenio, at Publius's invitation, sat down he still held in his hand the great staff with which he walked. It was over five feet long, of highly polished oak, and fixed on the end of it was a silver figure, about nine inches high, of his patron god, Apollo the Far-Darter, bearing his bow and quiver. For a few moments Publius forgot Parmenio and Sejanus and Rome as he looked at the lively silver figure. In thought he was far away on the plains of Troy, remembering how once the angry god had come down from Olympus like the night and had let his arrows fly against the Greeks who had displeased him, and dread had been the clanging of his silver bow.

'Publius,' said Caecilia, 'we are waiting.'

Publius came back to earth in Rome reluctantly. He had just begun to picture himself along with Apollo as part of the Trojan scene — and there were Achilles and Agamemnon in the background and the old priest of Apollo whose bright-eyed daughter Chryseis Agamemnon held in his tent, and Briseis of the fair cheeks whom Agamemnon tore from Achilles when he gave back his own captive. Publius found it much pleasanter to mix in his thoughts with these than to explain things to Parmenio. He began with a word of apology. 'I saw the silver bow on your Apollo and I thought of him as the warrior-god at Troy, but you, of course, know him as the god of prophecy.'

Parmenio inclined his head but said nothing. Publius, slightly abashed, hastened to explain that he wanted his daughter Metella to marry one of the kinsmen of Sejanus, but she herself and her mother were against it. Sejanus, he had reason to know, favoured it. The question was — and here he spoke carefully, watching Parmenio — whether Sejanus would attain that high place in the State for which he now seemed to be marked out. At this Parmenio's face was a shade more thoughtful, but he gave no other sign. If, Publius said, the future of Sejanus was what it seemed to be, there could be no doubt what he, Metella's father, must do for her good. Publius hesitated a little, then after a pause remarked that he was sure Parmenio would recognize that any matter concerning Sejanus — whether, in fact, for he might as

well be frank, Sejanus would succeed to supreme power — must be completely secret. He could not bring himself to mention the possible death of the Emperor, but he felt that Parmenio could not have acquired so great a reputation unless he was intelligent.

Parmenio sat with his eyes fixed on Publius, transferred his searching gaze for a few seconds to Caecilia, looked straight forward and said: 'What is said to me is known only to the god. What the god says is known only to me.'

Publius felt that this, if less sympathetic than he could have wished, was satisfactory. After all, he had never met the man before and Parmenio might well feel a little anxious at being thus involved in high and dangerous affairs of State by a Senator unknown to him except, of course, by his high reputation. An effusive Parmenio, he reflected, could not have been trusted when matters of life and death, for it might be no less, were concerned. A reserved, brooding Parmenio gave more ground for confidence.

After a slight pause, Publius told the story of the 'sign' that had been given him and Caecilia told her dream. Parmenio heard them both in silence. Then he asked questions, speaking slowly, pondering the answers but making no comment. He asked Publius whether on that night there had been a thunderstorm, with frequent lightning. Publius said there had been no storm; he had seen no lightning except the three flashes. Did the first flash appear to descend right on to Sejanus's house as though to strike it or did it fall short of the house as though to point it out? Was Sejanus's name carved on the pedestal of the statue? Did the lightning descend to the statue? Did it touch any letter of the name? Was there a wind blowing when he reached his house? Did the door appear to come open of its own accord, and did he notice whether the chaplet or any leaf from it was carried inside the house or moved from where it was lying?

When Parmenio came to Caecilia's dream he fastened on the lion-heads of the contestants and the signs by which she recognized who they were. Were the lion-heads there from the start, were they of the same size, were the heads and faces of the men, when at last she recognized them, just as she knew them in life, or were there differences? For instance, was any of them, Sejanus especially, bald? When she thought she saw one killing the other —

Caecilia stiffened a little as she heard the word 'thought' — how much of the actual stroke had she seen? What made the victor stumble? Was there anything material to account for both of them stumbling in the same way at the same point in the struggle? He seemed to find her answers vague.

Having finished his questions Parmenio rose. He said that he would consider all that had been said to him and return the next afternoon to give his opinion. Publius was at first disposed to be annoyed that Parmenio did not ask whether this would be a convenient time, but he was quick to recognize that this was a natural sign of the soothsayer's standing. Then, taking on a graver tone, Parmenio strongly recommended Publius and his wife to keep these proceedings secret. It was, he said dryly, in their own interest; they would realize that questions regarding the succession to the Emperor's power might be seriously misinterpreted by malicious persons if they became known. He added that of course neither then nor on the next day could he say anything which remotely involved the duration of the life of the Emperor 'whom the gods preserve!' Publius replied hastily that this was understood. He had been feeling for some time that he had been venturesome, but for the moment he enjoyed the sensation. He now told Parmenio that he desired him also to consult the stars about Metella and Aulus. He gave the dates of their birth and also that of Sejanus, which he had found out through Sextus Cornelius. Parmenio, assenting, bade them a grave farewell. He showed special consideration to Caecilia, who, he said, had enjoyed one of the most remarkable dreams in his experience. On reaching the door of the house he spoke to his secretary, who, returning, informed Publius of his master's fee for the forthcoming judgment. When Publius heard the figure he felt that it fully reflected the importance of the persons involved. He agreed, however, willingly, for he was determined now to have his answer. Then he suddenly remembered something that he had intended to mention to Parmenio. He hurried off to catch him before he left the house. He wanted, he said, to have Metella present next day when Parmenio returned. After all, she was the chief person concerned and she ought, he suggested, to be allowed to listen while her future was being decided and even — here he looked hopefully at Parmenio — to ask questions if she desired. Parmenio

replied without hesitation, firmly. He was not prepared to have any other present besides Publius and his wife. Still less could he submit to be questioned by anyone. He spoke what he was inspired to speak and unless it was accepted without reserve he could not speak at all. On no account must Metella be present. If, he said, Publius would bear in mind the implications of what had been said that afternoon, he would not desire to involve his daughter in them. In any event he, Parmenio, would not permit it. Publius, feeling again that he was in deeper waters than he had intended, meekly agreed. On returning to his room he found the secretary still waiting for him. The man said that it was customary to pay his master 10 per cent of the fee in advance, and for this preliminary consultation an additional 5 per cent over and above the fee. 'It astonishes me,' Publius said to Caecilia, 'that these unworldly, learned people should be so business-like.' Caecilia replied that, as she had often told him, he was an innocent.

Metella had heard from her mother about the dream and the sign. She was not indifferent to the visit of Parmenio. She had indeed said plainly that if a soothsayer was to be called in she ought to have a say in choosing him and that in any case she ought to have the opportunity of criticizing his views, if she wanted to. When, however, her father told her that she could not be present the next day, she replied that since she did not intend to marry Aulus it made no difference to her what Parmenio or any other hired Greekling might say. She thought it a pity that Romans, especially if they were supposed to be of good blood, could not get married without the aid of foreign adventurers. Publius was hurt that she should be so ungrateful and shocked that she should wrong Parmenio. He devoted some earnest minutes to explaining that he and Caecilia, being unable to agree about the future of a daughter whom they equally loved, had felt themselves driven at last to put their difficulties before a learned man of whose wisdom and impartiality they had the best evidence and whose professional standing was guaranteed by a remarkable story of divine approval. Publius even threw in the evidence of the high fee charged by Parmenio. Metella replied that it seemed to her a waste of money since her future husband, Lucius Paetus, was a poor man.

On the next afternoon Parmenio came again. He was at once conducted to a special room where Publius and Caecilia awaited him. Publius had decided that the gravity of the occasion ought to be marked by a suggestion of the old Roman virtues. He had gathered together the busts of several old Roman worthies — the stern Cato, Camillus and Fabricius. They would, he felt, provide a suitable austerity for a solemn occasion. Parmenio showed no sign of noticing the display. He was on this occasion accompanied into the room by his two pages. One of them bore the staff that carried the figure of Apollo. When his master was seated he placed this in his hands. Parmenio held it upright, leaning on it slightly, while he was speaking. The other page bore images in silver of the tripod of the Delphic priestess and of Apollo's lyre — each of them seven or eight inches in height — and placed them on a little table before Parmenio. Thus he had what Metella, when she heard of it, called the whole of the god's 'rig-out' — the bow and quiver for his strength in arms, the lyre for his gift of song, the tripod for his prophetic power. Parmenio remained still for a full minute. He had a rapt look, as though he was labouring under some compelling pressure. Then he spoke: —

'The gods are not as seen in the dream. The gods are great and beautiful. Man fashions them in his own image and in this dream they wore the shapes and showed the manners that man attributes to them. In the dream they used the combats of the games to express their will about the future, but it does not mean that those who fought in the dream will fight in actual life. The lion-heads show that each of the three — Sejanus, Gaius and Claudius — will reach a station beyond what he has at present. Sejanus is already almost designated Emperor in succession to Caesar. Gaius and Claudius are members of Caesar's family, next to him in rank. They will all three succeed to Caesar's supreme power in the order in which they appeared in the dream. But Sejanus kept his lion-head — he will die a natural death. Gaius stumbled and lost his lion-head — he will die violently. Claudius also stumbled and lost the lion-symbol of his power; he too will have a violent end.

'The explanation of the oak chaplet is this. Since there was no storm, the lightning flashes came from the gods to give a

message. That which fell over the statue did not touch or hurt it. No letter of the name of Sejanus on the pedestal was injured, as happened once when Divine Augustus was about to die and lightning blasted the first letter of "Caesar" on his statue. The lightning pointed out the chaplet and then, when the chaplet had been transferred by divine act to your house' (he looked at Publius) 'pointed it out again. Even if it was not carried into your house it remained motionless at the porch. This shows that the power of Sejanus will be extended from his house to yours and cover all that you and yours may do. The stars confirm it. Aulus, your future son-in-law' (he spoke as though it were a well-known fact) 'was born under the constellation Leo and so, I have discovered, was Sejanus. Their fates are intertwined.'

The soothsayer fell silent, withdrawing into himself, then said: 'Your question is thus answered. Sejanus will be Caesar. He will be Caesar of Rome and of the world until the gods in their good time think fit to take him peacefully to themselves.' Then at last, relaxing with a charming smile, he said — 'A question which was dangerous for you to ask and for me to answer, but I have answered it.' His stiffness fell away from him, he became affable and kindly, personally accepted the balance of his fee, congratulated Publius and Caecilia on having a daughter whom all Rome admired for her charm and intelligence — Caecilia wondered how he knew so much about her — and asked whether he might assume that her betrothal would soon be announced to the accomplished Aulus Cornelius. Publius said that it would, at which his wife looked sour, and when he added that he and Caecilia were grateful to Parmenio for resolving their doubts that afternoon she bade him a stiff good-bye and took her leave. Parmenio asked when the betrothal might take place and hinted that, having helped to bring it about, he would be honoured if he might be present at the ceremony. At this Publius, greatly alarmed, got him away as quickly as he could, thanking him repeatedly. He did not relish having to inform Metella that he had finally made up his mind, but he had decided that he must put all doubts behind him now. He found less opposition from his wife than he had expected. She disliked his decision, but she had come to believe that they must give way to Sejanus the all-powerful, who could destroy Metella as well as the rest of them

if he chose and would probably in any case make certain that she went to Aulus. Publius expected Metella to be furiously angry when he told her that the ceremony of betrothal must take place in six weeks' time, by the end of October. He found her merely contemptuous. She could only hope, she said, that he based his decision on something better than the surrender of his own intelligence to that of a soothsayer of whom, so far as she could learn, he really knew nothing. He had brought her up to use her own mind, for which she thanked him, and since what he now told her to do was in her opinion both foolish and wrong, and since she distrusted Aulus and loved and would always love Lucius Paetus, she would not do his bidding. She was aware of his legal powers over her, but he had always told her that a Roman father should not exert his legal powers on an unwilling child in matters of vital moment, and since he was now doing this, she would not obey. Publius listened sadly, said that he was sure she would think better of it, he would get her mother to talk to her and the ceremony must take place by the end of October. Metella went to her own room.

Publius was very uneasy. The exhilaration caused by Parmenio's pronouncement had vanished. He knew that his wife was grieved and his daughter tormented and angry. He wanted to find some refuge for his mind, and thought that he would like to talk to Pericles. When he came, Publius said to him with a seeming hesitancy — 'Well, your young mistress is to be betrothed to Aulus Cornelius in six weeks. That's a good thing settled.'

'No, sir,' said Pericles.

Publius was startled. Such a thing had not happened since he bought the slave. He thought that he must have misheard. Speaking precisely he said, 'It's very satisfactory'.

'No, sir,' said Pericles. 'I ask your pardon, sir. I ought not to say it, but I feel strongly that it's a bad thing. I hope it won't happen, sir.'

'And would you be so kind as to say why?'

'The young mistress would be very unhappy, sir. She does not like the young man Aulus and she loves someone else. I know it, sir; we all know it. This marriage would destroy her life, and she ought not to be forced into it at such a cost. I am sorry to speak like this, sir, but I love the young mistress.'

Publius threw himself into a chair, scowling. Presently he heard Pericles say — ‘You sent for me, sir?’

‘I — oh, did I? No, I didn’t. I don’t want you. You don’t understand anything. Send Thyrsus to me. I’ve some accounts to go through.’

Thyrsus came smoothly in, with a little speech prepared. ‘I hope you were pleased with Parmenio, sir. It is good news, if I may say so, that everything is settled.’

‘No, it isn’t,’ snapped Publius. ‘And how do you know what’s good or not? You should stick to your figures. I wish I had intelligent servants.’

He relapsed again into moodiness until at last Thyrsus said, ‘You wanted to see me about some accounts, sir?’

‘Nothing of the kind,’ said Publius. ‘I want to be alone. You can go.’

Unable to get any comfort from his thoughts Publius went out into his garden and, taking a hoe, began to hoe round his rose trees. Thinking of his troubles more than of the trees, he jabbed deep into the ground. Presently he heard a noise and, looking up, was aware that the white-headed chief of the garden-slaves, the veteran Hispo, was regarding him with disapproval.

Hispo was a Spaniard. Long ago there had been a revolt among the tribesmen in the north-west of Spain. When it was crushed, his parents having been killed, he and his twin-sister, at the age of ten, had been taken with a horde of captives to Massilia and there sold, she to the African, he to the Roman, market. Publius’s grandfather had bought him and had called him Hispo since he had to be called something and had come from Hispania. Hispo had been a household slave for sixty years.

‘Well,’ said Publius, ‘what’s the matter with *you*?’

‘This rose tree, sir. The roots are near the surface. You’ll be injuring them.’ He pointed accusingly.

‘And it’s a crime, I suppose, if I touch one of my own rose trees?’

‘Yes, sir. It may never properly recover, sir. You’d better let me do it.’ He took the hoe firmly out of his master’s hand.

All of them were against him, Publius thought. Everybody was against him. That spoilt fool, Pericles! He knew nothing about anything except books. He had no idea of politics. Thyrsus

had more sense, though he did not like Thyrsus as he did Pericles. And what right had Pericles to speak to him like that? Oh well, they could say and think what they liked about him, he was acting for the best. It was no use hanging about any longer here in the garden or the house. Caecilia would be after him next. Her dream hadn't turned out quite as well as she thought! He would get off to the Senate and see if there was any more news about Sejanus. There was usually some new report nowadays, mostly, though not always, cracking up him and his prospects. What was that last story, that Caesar had sent a letter to some public body commending him as 'Sharer of my Cares' and another letter calling him affectionately 'My Sejanus', as though he was already a member of the family? He would go and see. He wished there was bad news about Sejanus. He wished Sejanus was dead. He didn't want to make Metella unhappy but what was he to do? This horrible Rome! Nothing had ever gone right since a lot of brigands had exploited the simple, honest Republic for their own selfish ends — Sulla and Marius, Pompey and Caesar and Crassus, Antony and Lepidus and Octavianus, the late Augustus, now Divine. He cursed the lot of them. Yes, if only Sejanus, the latest of them and the most to be feared, were dead!

Metella, in her room, wrote a letter to Lucius —

'My father has just told me, my Lucius, that he will betroth me in six weeks' time to Aulus Cornelius. He called in a soothsayer, a friend (so he told me) of the famous Thrasyllus, to say whether Sejanus will shortly be the first man in the State and whether therefore I must marry his kinsman, Aulus. Having got the answer that he wanted, my father says that he dare not longer delay to betroth me to Aulus, lest the great man, soon to be the greatest, should cherish a quarrel against us all.

My Lucius, I will not agree. I have told my father that come what may I will not marry Aulus. Since I first knew I loved you I have had no other thought but that some day I should be wholly yours and you mine.. I have no other thought now even though they fix the day to bind me to a man who may be rich and powerful and have a Caesar to support him, but who does not count for me so much as a single look from you.

I do not think that anyone could love more than I love you, my Lucius. Everyone and everything I judge by the love I have for you. Whoever does you a kindness is my friend; Whoever does you injury injures me. He is no less my enemy than yours and you will yourself forgive him sooner than I. For you I would leave home and parents and all that I possess. Without you I would not wish to live and you will know therefore that I would sooner die than marry Aulus.

I do not despair, for there may yet be some way of escape. Remember always that I love you alone.

You must not come now and see me here, but I will meet you often elsewhere. I can meet you at your cousin's shop in the Suburra. No one will suspect and I shall be happier with your pastrycook cousin and his plebeian wife than with all the blue-blooded Corneliuses and Antoniuses, not to mention the Aelius Sejanuses that have afflicted Rome. You will frown at that, I know, because you are so very, very respectful about Rome.

Iris, who takes this letter to you, will arrange our next meeting. She is a slave but she is my friend, and yours.

Aulus came to-day, but I could not see him. I had a headache — most unfortunate! I must see him sometimes, though, lest he force matters on. He is tenacious but he will get nothing from me, now or ever. You know, my Lucius.'

Lucius sent a reply which was more spirited than at the moment he felt —

'Nothing shall discourage me. If you have to obey your father, he has to obtain your consent, and I am sure you will not give it. After all, what can he do if you stand out? It is true, I suppose, that the new man, unless there is a change, can ruin whom he chooses. That is the hold your father has over you.

Two things I cannot understand. The first is why your father, whom I like and who I know loves you, should submit his Roman judgment to these whining, wheedling, imported charlatans. He is proud, is he not? of being the simple Roman. Is not that why he loves his Cato and his Horace?

I respect him for it, but then why can't he be contented with whatever he can learn from the simple Roman lore of omens and divination? He, an Antonius, would not go down, would he, into the forum or the circus to have his fortune told publicly for a few coppers? Then why does an Antonius bring the fortune-teller into his own house, no doubt paying him some enormous sum?

The second thing I cannot understand is why Caesar should choose Sejanus rather than his own kinsman Gaius unless it is that he is in his dotage or Gaius merely infantile. Perhaps, I think, a bit of both.'

Aulus had heard from his father that Publius had privately fixed the betrothal for the end of October. He was not deceived by Metella's headache nor was he disposed to submit to her whims. Sextus had also told him that Metella was obstinate and that Publius was having to exert his legal rights over her. Aulus was not sure that if Metella resisted strongly, Publius might not back out of his decision. He thought that a public announcement would make things safer for him. This was the reason why on the next day Publius received another letter from Sejanus. It was friendly, saying how much Sejanus regretted that in spite of his first letter he had not yet heard that Metella was betrothed to Aulus or even that the date was fixed. It would give him so much pleasure to think that Publius and Caecilia were allied to him by marriage. Then there was a sudden, curious change of tone. In these days of abrupt vicissitudes, he said, when so much was uncertain — though he hoped that everything would soon be certain — it was a good thing to know the friends on whom one could rely in the day of testing. He was sure that he was right in thinking that Publius and Caecilia were among them.

This plain hint alarmed Publius. It demolished any faint hope he had that he could temporize. It confirmed his fear that he could not afford to displease Sextus Cornelius and his son. His wife suggested that they should all retire to one of their farms, choosing the most distant from Rome. She was, he said to himself, an amiable innocent. She supposed that in the Italian countryside they could hide themselves from the anger of an Emperor which could track down and destroy a suspect in the

remotest parts of the world. He told Metella of the letter, because he felt that to some extent it justified him. She said mildly, 'I am sorry for you, father; you weren't meant to handle men like this. Now I must write and tell Lucius about it'.

Publius did not object to this. He was sure that at the finish she would do what he desired and that to oppose her in small matters would only make her more obstinate.

Metella wrote to Lucius, telling him of Sejanus's veiled threat. She said —

'I cannot understand why Sejanus is allowed to lord it over Rome. Why do the members of Caesar's family, the proud men and women of the great Julian and Claudian houses, tolerate this upstart? Do they intend to sit quiet while he destroys them one by one? Cannot they combine to persuade the runaway Caesar that he is himself in peril? Is not the pimply-faced, spindleshanks Gaius the rival of Sejanus? Why does he hide himself at Capreae with Caesar, too nervous or too servile to strike a blow for his own future, it may be for his own life? Or is he just a coward? Aulus, by the way, says he is Gaius's friend, so perhaps Gaius-Caesar would treat us no better than Sejanus-Caesar, but we don't know that, whereas we do know what Sejanus now threatens. I am angry because I do not see why the power of a new Caesar should be brought in to prevent you and me from being happy. But it is no good to be angry and very good to love you, which I do, and to be loved by you, which I know I am.

If you reply to this be cautious. I am incautious, but I don't want you to be. Or perhaps you had better not reply at all. My father sometimes says that these days are as bad as those of Cicero who, when the "bad times" of Pompey and Caesar were beginning, told his friend Atticus that he feared lest the very paper he wrote on should betray him. So perhaps you had better destroy this (though I shan't destroy yours!).'

Pericles, to whom the letter was given because Iris was occupied, was summoned by his master just as he was setting out. He was distressed, being heart and soul with his young mistress and

her lover. He was delighted when the ever obliging Thyrsus offered to go with the letter at once.

Metella said little to her mother, for she thought that Caecilia might have done more to oppose Publius's wishes. But she would not incite her mother to oppose her father. Her parents had always shown each other an affectionate toleration which she did not desire to disturb. To the girl Iris she showed her feelings more freely, declaring that she would never give way but that she saw no means of escape.

'We could run away,' said Iris. (She always said 'we' when Metella was concerned.) 'If we could get to Judaea I have friends and relatives who would shelter us. They would do anything when they knew what you had done for me.' She added hopefully, 'They live near the coast'.

Metella laughed. 'We should not get as far as our own coast. My father is kind to me but he would not tolerate my running away. And then I should be shut up and you would be taken away from me. She explained to Iris the complete power that the head of a family had over his sons and daughters.

'You are worse off,' said Iris, 'than we slaves. We are always unfortunate — it is our life — but you have all that you can wish and when you are unfortunate you are all the more wretched.' Then she said, 'But you will not marry Aulus?'

'No,' said Metella. 'Whatever happens, no. But I don't know what to do — I don't know what to do.'

'I know what we could do,' said Iris. 'I could kill him and then myself. No one would mind except you.' She seemed to be considering and then said, 'I think Lucius Paetus would tell me to do it'.

'But I don't,' said Metella smiling, 'and you take your orders from me.'

'You think I wouldn't do it, but I would. I've thought about it and I know how I would do it.'

'Do you so?' said Metella. 'I don't doubt you, but at present you'll do nothing except wait for me. No daggers yet!'

Iris nodded. 'I know. And perhaps it won't be necessary. I believe the Lord God of my people will help us. He is a just God.'

'He hasn't saved you from being sold as a slave.'

'He brought me here to you. But who are we to understand

him? He is just and merciful and never forgets his people. He knows that you saved me.'

'Well, pray to your God, for I think we shall need whatever gods there be. We must be patient. Perhaps things will improve.'

But the days went by and things did not improve.

Towards noon on October 15th, Metella and Lucius Paetus met at the home of Tullus, the cousin in the Suburra. It consisted of rooms above the shop in a great brick tenement block; the shop was one of those which ran all round the block, forming the ground-floor frontage. When Metella and Lucius arrived the cousin and his eldest child, a boy of eleven, were out delivering goods. His wife, Norba, was serving a customer — a woman who was sitting in a comfortable chair which had a high round back and a step on which to rest the feet. Having brought an order with her, she was reading the items out one by one as Norba collected the goods. As soon as she had gone, Norba, picking out some of her best cakes and giving them to Metella, sent the pair upstairs. She told them to send the other children, whom they would find there, down to her; there were four of them, including a fifteen-months-old baby, and when they came she hurried them off to amuse themselves, warning the eldest to remember what happened when children went near the river. Metella and Lucius, eating the cakes, examined their future without discovering any comfort.

Publius had fixed the last day of October for the betrothal. He had informed the friends of the family. Some few among them, knowing Metella's mind, condemned him, but most thought that he was prudent and many that he was enviable in having a daughter through whom he and his could share in the illimitable favours of the next Emperor.

'But, Lucius,' Metella was saying, 'even if Caesar has given a priesthood to Sejanus he's given one also to young Gaius. It's possible, to say the least, that he's keeping Gaius with him at Capreae and giving him this and that in order to make him Emperor —'

'Not in the next fortnight, I think, said Lucius. 'In any case he won't do more than tell Sejanus to adopt him as his successor or something like that. It won't stop Sejanus, so it won't help us.'

'Still,' said Metella, 'there's another thing which everyone

knows is happening, except of course the Roman people, which knows nothing and counts for nothing. Caesar has intervened to save people whom Sejanus is attacking and what's more, he spoke of him the other day curtly as 'Sejanus' in a public message instead of flattering him as usual. My father says it puzzled the Senate.'

'And that won't help you either, my dears,' said a sardonic, husky voice. Lollia Claudia was standing in the doorway. 'I thought I would find you here. I slipped away from that silly business in the Campus Martius. You know — they've been sacrificing the October Horse. I'm not sure why, but I believe they sacrifice it to the harvest spirit. What I never understand is why, after they've had the chariot race, they should sacrifice one of the winning horses and not one of the losers. It seems waste to me. Sejanus, the new priest, was there as large as life. I soon got tired of it, so I went off to your home, Metella, but you weren't there. That slave of yours, Pericles, told me to come here. I wish he were mine. He's a rum one. Would you believe it, he asked me how I was, and when I said that I suffered from morning headaches, he said might he suggest that I should drink every day from the spring on Horace's farm. I had no idea what he was talking about, so I made him bring me the book, and do you know what Horace said? He told his friend Quinctius that the farm contained a spring which was "good for weak heads and good for bowels, too." I wonder if your father would sell Pericles to me, Metella? I'd love to have him. He would give my family a literary air, which it's certainly never had yet. Besides, to have your little ailments prescribed for every morning in real poetry by Horace —'

'Lollia Claudia,' said Lucius mildly, 'forgive me, but were you not saying that even if the Emperor sometimes snubs Sejanus it will not help us?'

'Yes, and I will tell you why. I belong to the Claudian house like Tiberius himself and I know the family character. All the Claudians are hard to live with and always have been. They're an intolerant lot. One of my ancestors, Claudius Pulcher, when he commanded the Roman fleet against the Carthaginians, wanted to give battle, but when he took the auspices, he found that the sacred chickens refused to eat, which meant that he ought to abstain from fighting. So he threw the chickens into the sea,

saying that if they would not eat they could drink. Then he gave battle and lost the fleet. His sister got into great trouble because, when her carriage was slowed down by the throng in the streets of Rome, she cried out that she wished her brother was alive to lose another fleet so that there would be less of a crowd to stop her. My opinion is that Tiberius only wants to make sure that Sejanus does not become too uppish. Make him a priest but make Gaius a priest, too! Let him marry Livilla but don't let him think he can ruin any good Roman at his pleasure! Say "my dear friend, Sejanus" one day and curt "Sejanus" the next! That's a Claudian all over. Keep everybody in his place! I feel the same way myself about Sejanus, only more so.'

'Then there's no hope,' said Lucius.

'And what do you gain by saying so?' asked Lollia, 'even if it were so. Look at Metella — does she ever give up hope? I know nothing hopeful but, if you ask me, there are some queer things going on. I have a cousin who has a high command on the German frontier and he says there's a mighty coming and going of messengers just now. Maybe they're from Rome, maybe from Capreae. Perhaps that means that Sejanus is getting all ready to take over, or perhaps it means something different. I don't know. But, Metella, I can't see why you don't tell your father that you agree to be betrothed to Aulus and then decide for yourself afterwards whether you will marry him or not. Your father can always break off the undertaking if he chooses or if you can make him. Who knows what will happen?'

'No,' said Metella. 'I won't do that. If I give way this time I shall give way again. My father's word will be involved. Aulus will have given me presents and a ring. The whole Cornelian house would resent my withdrawal as an insult. They would never forgive my father. It would be the end of him if Sejanus were still in power.'

'Well, then, I don't know what you will do, my dear,' said Lollia kindly. 'But if I can do anything to help you, let me know. I wish I could produce some really bad omens to scare your father. But he's too much of a politician, I'm afraid. Romans are terribly impressed nowadays by omens when they're favourable but not otherwise.'

On the same day Sextus Cornelius in the Campus Martius was

looking idly about him while the priests were collecting the blood from the tail of the October Horse. (The blood was preserved until the following April, when it was burned as part of the spring sacrifices.) He noticed Publius among the Senators. Going over to him he said he hoped that all was well now and that everything would go smoothly on the day of the betrothal. 'Oh, yes,' said Publius hurriedly, 'yes, everything is all right. There was never any difficulty.' And then, anxious to change the subject and remembering one of his many anxieties, he said: 'These rumours about young Gaius — that Caesar now speaks very highly of him — they say that Caesar sees him every day and consults him often — there's nothing serious, I suppose?' Publius was a little self-important; being on the threshold of a great alliance, he spoke as one entitled to know; he was also a little nervous.

Sextus replied with the slightly condescending smile of one who was well accustomed to know State secrets. 'Oh, Gaius!' he said. 'Yes, Caesar seems fond of him.' He turned his narrow, calculating eyes on Publius. 'If you remember, there was a time when Caesar was fond of Nero, Germanicus's son. Not many years ago, either. Nero was very injudicious; the things he said did him much harm with Caesar. You would have thought that Gaius would have learned a lesson. From what I hear I am afraid that he has not.' He paused significantly, then went on — 'I see our friend Paconianus is here this morning.' He indicated a cheerful, burly man who was standing not far away among Sejanus's relatives and supporters and seemed to be amusing them with lively talk. This was Paconianus, an ambitious man who had already been praetor and hoped to do such good services to Sejanus that he might yet be Consul. He had the power that came of worming out other men's secrets. He knew more of these than anyone in Rome and was hated for his knowledge. 'The good Paconianus!' said Sextus. 'See how merry he is. If I was young Gaius, I should be anxious. Paconianus knows too much about him.'

That evening Publius said to his wife — 'I met Sextus Cornelius at the festival. Sejanus is going to attack Gaius. He's using Paconianus to collect the evidence.'

'Or invent it?' said Caecilia.

'It's all the same. Sextus thinks it will finish Gaius. Then Sejanus will have everything.'

'Publius, how many years is it since Brutus and Cassius murdered Julius Caesar?'

'Seventy-five.'

'Why don't they do that sort of thing now, then?'

'Rome, Caecilia, grew tired of blood and war and would endure anything for peace.'

'Oh, but there's blood now, Publius — you know it — there's bloodshed all the time.'

'Only among a few of us at the top, my dear. The Romans don't mind that. They like it when the privileged bleed.'

'So a Julius Caesar now is always safe?'

'I wouldn't say that. You might have one murdered any time. But in his place you might get one much worse.'

'Publius, I wish we could return to a farm in the country. You know the sort of thing — ten miles from the nearest posting station.'

'Well, perhaps we shall, Caecilia — after the betrothal.'

CHAPTER VI

ALL through this year rumours as wild as they were contradictory had run through Rome, the Italian countryside, and the provinces, which multiplied them a thousandfold. It seemed that at last after years of uncertainty, intrigue, violence and fear the Roman world would know who, after Tiberius, was to be its master.

Tiberius himself had only reached power because of the death of others. The first thought of the Emperor Augustus had been that his heir should be Marcellus, his sister's son whom he had married to his daughter Julia, afterwards banished by him for her immoralities. Marcellus died at twenty years. Then Augustus turned to Julia's two sons, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, by her second husband Agrippa. But Gaius died of a wound in Asia at the age of twenty-four and Lucius on a journey to Spain when he was nineteen. Then Drusus, Tiberius's brother, died from an accident, so that Augustus was now driven to rely on Tiberius.

Various honours marked him as successor. But not him alone. Augustus, still desiring a prince of his own blood, adopted the young brother of Lucius and Gaius, the posthumous son of Julia and Agrippa, but the youth was later disinherited, exiled and done away with.

Now Augustus married Tiberius to Julia as her third husband and conferred on him the same powers as he had gathered into his own hands to make himself supreme. They were those of the proconsul and the tribune. The proconsul had the military 'Imperium' of the chief officer of State, the tribune had the power which gave him the veto against other officials and made him sacrosanct against interference. Clearly, Tiberius was to be Emperor. But although Tiberius had a son of his own, Augustus made him adopt into his family Germanicus, his nephew. This was, to the Roman world, a plain sign that in Augustus's mind Germanicus was at least to follow Tiberius as the ruling Caesar. Germanicus was Augustus's great nephew and a grandson of Mark Antony, the triumvir. His wife was Agrippina, daughter by Agrippa of Augustus's own daughter Julia. Therefore she, of his own flesh and blood, continued the Julian line, and her children by Germanicus combined the claims of the Julian and Claudian houses.

Thus, in the year when Tiberius succeeded, Germanicus was marked out as the next Caesar, and in the same year, as it chanced, Tiberius appointed the knight L. Aelius Sejanus to be one of the two Prefects of the Praetorian Guards, who were the garrison of Rome and the personal bodyguard of the Emperor.

For the next few years Germanicus, Agrippina and their children were the favourites of the Roman people. Germanicus, pleasant in manner and approachable, an agreeable contrast to the stern Tiberius, was twenty-nine years old when Augustus died. He had already three sons — Nero, Drusus and Gaius Caligula — aged eight, seven and two years. In the next five years he had three daughters also — Agrippina, Drusilla and Julia. He and his wife enjoyed the affection which the possession of a large family brings to a public man in a society in which small families and childlessness prevail. Agrippina, too well aware that she was a grandchild of the great Augustus, was proud in spirit and in manner, outspoken in resentments, intractable to authority, rebellious even

against the Caesar. Tiberius, recalling Germanicus from military successes on the German frontier, sent him on a special mission to the East. When he died mysteriously at Antioch it was suspected that he had been poisoned. It was declared that his enemies had used against him not only poison but black magic and that the evidence was there to be seen — images of his body and inscriptions of his name pierced through and through to bring him to his death. (It was remembered afterwards that in Asia he had consulted a famous oracle of Apollo whose priest had hinted, however ambiguously, at his death; there was no doubt that the priest was truly inspired by the god, because, after having descended to an underground cavern and drunk from a mysterious spring, he rendered his oracles in correct metrical verse although he himself knew nothing of writing or of metre.)

The Roman populace exhibited the deepest grief at the first news that its idol was dead or at least dying. The city was silent and deserted. Equally, when an untrue report was spread that Germanicus was better, the mob, always quick to believe, to exaggerate and to spread false news, went into loud delight, crowded the streets, thronged the temples and awoke the Emperor from his sleep by triumphantly chanting a line of verse — 'Saved is Rome and saved our country; saved is Germanicus.' The final news that Germanicus was dead caused a grief that would have been universal had it not been, so the ill-disposed declared, that Tiberius and his mother Livia were not really distressed.

So, five years after Tiberius came to power, Agrippina, widow of the designated successor to power, the admired general, the popular darling, was left to maintain the rights of their young sons, Nero aged thirteen, Drusus aged twelve, and Gaius Caligula ('Little Boots') aged seven. But a new and unexpected rival faced her. Year by year Sejanus, the Praetorian Prefect, had grown in the confidence of Tiberius, widened his ambitions together with his powers, and assailed and struck down, one by one, those who stood or might stand in his path. Of these Agrippina, her children and her friends were now the chief. Nor, in his attack on the children did anyone aid him more than the passionate, defiant, unhappy Agrippina herself. The Senate, as Tiberius said of them contemptuously, might be 'ready made for slavery' but Agrippina was a stubborn rebel. Her eldest son, Nero, had

been married to a grand-daughter of Tiberius. The people were delighted, but Sejanus was soon seen to have made a long stride towards power when he was promised the betrothal of his daughter to the son of Claudius, the brother of Germanicus and nephew of Tiberius. True, the girl was at the time an infant, the betrothal lay only in the future and Claudius was a derided nobody — the idea that he could ever be Emperor would have been a joke had anyone thought of it — but it brought Sejanus for the first time close to membership of the Imperial house. From that day men said that they knew what he wanted and what his chance was of obtaining it. The triumph of the betrothal was short-lived, for Claudius's son, a few days later, throwing a pear into the air in order to catch it in his mouth, choked and died. But Sejanus was no more the conventional good-for-nothing 'favourite' than Tiberius was a weak ruler. He was energetic, efficient, vigilant. When the theatre of Pompey was burned down he won the credit for stopping a dangerous conflagration, and the Senate voted that his statue should be set up in the theatre. About the same time he secured a change which more than anything else showed the confidence that his master had in him. The Praetorian Guards were stationed partly in Rome and partly in neighbouring towns. Sejanus brought the whole force into one camp in Rome. Thus it would be a compact body, instantly ready for action, against any who might threaten to disturb the Emperor's peace. Thus also, said Sejanus's enemies, it would better serve the ends of an ambitious Minister, all the more if he set himself, as they said Sejanus did, to win its personal allegiance, all the more if the Master should ever absent himself from Rome and leave his Minister in charge.

Then Fate — or was it some human hand assisting Fate? — removed one of the prospective successors to Tiberius's power. His son Drusus, who hated Sejanus, had openly railed against him and on one occasion had struck him, died. The railing had been conscientiously reported by his wife Livilla to Sejanus, for the Prefect added to his other equipment the qualities of a skilled seducer. Agrippina now saw the way to power opened for her sons; Sejanus saw her and her sons isolated, the only serious stumbling-block between him and the succession. Soon Sejanus addressed Tiberius formally: he was the modest, loyal Knight

pointing out regretfully that Agrippina and her friends were setting up a party faction in a State which should know no loyalty except to Caesar. He felt, he said, that he himself was in danger from her intrigues and, though contented with his present status so long as he could serve the Emperor, he respectfully suggested that Tiberius, should he desire to give a husband to Livilla, would consider him, mere Knight though he might be. Tiberius did not agree nor yet refuse; he would make his mind known in due course, he said, but in the meantime he would say that there was no position which could be too high for his devoted servant. Sejanus turned to undermine Agrippina through her friends. Agrippina flew with angry protests to Tiberius, declaring that it was she herself, which was quite true, who was being struck at. Tiberius inquired sternly, quoting a line of Greek, whether she considered herself wronged if she had not the throne. Shortly afterwards she demanded that he should allow her to marry again, but Tiberius was little likely to assign a male head, who could only be a leading man in the State, to a movement possibly threatening to himself. Soon the breach was beyond repair. Agrippina — again prompted, his enemies said, by Sejanus, but who knows with what truth? — came to believe that Tiberius meant to poison her. When at dinner with him and his mother Livia she refused to eat. When with his own hands he passed her a dish of apples, commending the flavour, she handed them on, untouched, to the slaves. Tiberius remarked to his mother that it was not astonishing if he decided to take severe measures against a woman who was accusing him of murder by poisoning.

In the next year Tiberius left Rome for the island of Capreae, near Naples, nor did he ever enter Rome again. Some said that Sejanus had got him away in order the better to carry out his own designs on power. Others said, but later, that Tiberius was seeking a greater exclusion in which freely to practise the vices, natural and unnatural, which a hostile tradition has ascribed to him. Or perhaps he was only weary of the quarrels and intrigues by which he was surrounded, just as he was contemptuous alike of the Senate and of the mob. For some years he continued from his retreat in Capreae to direct the affairs of State with his old vigilance. Sejanus went with him, but the attack on Agrippina and her friends went on, for with Tiberius implacably hostile

their complete ruin now seemed certain to reward Sejanus's perseverance.

In the next year Livia Augusta, widow of Augustus, died at the age of eighty-six, and if her existence had in any way restrained Tiberius and Sejanus in their attack on her grand-daughter and great-grandchildren the obstacle was gone. Tiberius soon sent the Senate a letter denouncing Agrippina and Nero. He did not allege conspiracy, whatever he believed and whatever was the truth, but against Nero he charged gross immorality and against Agrippina rebellious speech and spirit. Nor, which most alarmed the Senate, did he say what punishment he wanted, so that they feared lest whatever they did they should incur his anger. Meanwhile the mob, which after ten years still retained its affection for the memory and family of Germanicus, carried the statues of Agrippina and Nero to the Senate House, declared that the 'letter' from Tiberius was a forgery, and cheered him as well as them. Tiberius sent another letter angrily rebuking Senate and people. He demanded that the task of punishment be left to him. The Senate had to content itself with expressing its humble desire to inflict the vengeance which the Emperor reserved for himself. Tiberius ordered Agrippina and Nero to be put in chains and carried into exile. Nero was driven to suicide next year. About the same time his brother Drusus was sent to Rome and there confined in an underground room in the Palace. Of Sejanus's rivals only the young prince Gaius Caligula, now eighteen years old, survived. It remained for Sejanus to secure from Tiberius the designation of himself as the successor.

Tiberius soon announced that in the coming year he himself would be Consul and would have Sejanus as his colleague. Thereupon Sejanus went to Rome to hold the Consulship. He was the man on the spot. He was controller of the Praetorian Guards. He was allied by marriage with some of the most important commanders of legions on the frontiers; it may be that they held their commands because they were allied with him by marriage. Many of the supporters of the family of Germanicus had, after the ruin of Agrippina, Nero and Drusus, come over to him. Above all, he had the confidence of his master. The Senate, the old nobility, the aspiring politicians, the ambitious Knights, all waited on him, hoping for his favour, fearing his displeasure.

In the early mornings the crowds gathered about his house merely to watch the stream of clients entering to pay him their respects. Later, they cheered him when he came out and, accompanied by a large body of supporters and a detachment of his Guards, went to the Forum or the Senate House, or to hold a review of the Praetorians. The Roman people well understood who ruled in Rome when the young prince Drusus was shut up underground, his brother Nero was dead and his mother imprisoned on a barren island and soon, it might be — as soon it was — to die. The Roman people knew who it was that controlled all the means of communication with the Emperor secluded in his little Capreae and who gave orders to the Emperor's picked Praetorian Guards. And when the people went to the Games which Sejanus or one of his friends provided for them they had fine stories to pass on to one another: how the Senate had conferred on Sejanus the military authority of the proconsul, how Tiberius had appointed him a member of one of the great priesthoods, how someone had just said that the real Emperor was Sejanus and that Tiberius, the Caesar, was only the governor of an island. When Tiberius, after a few months of office, laid down the Consulship, which meant that Sejanus also had to resign it, no one was much impressed. The Emperor had publicly conferred the honour of partnership in the historic office; it was the act, not the length of tenure, which had significance. Rome asked only for two more signs. One was the acceptance of Sejanus into the ruling house by marriage with Livilla — the guarantee for which he had pleaded six years before and which now at last was known to be promised him. The other was that Sejanus should be invested with the Tribune's Power, that high authority with which the shrewd Augustus had taken care to buttress his position. In private and in public, at the Games and at the Baths, in the Senate House and the Forum, among the Guards and in the frontier legions, among the Italian peasants and the Oriental idolaters of power, the question in the autumn of this year was everywhere the same — was Sejanus now to have the Tribune's Power? If he had that, then he had everything.

On October 15th, the same day that Lucius and Metella met in the Suburra, a group of men were standing on the jetty in a

little bay in the island of Capreae. Two of them were close to the water's edge, where a boat, with a dozen slaves waiting at the oars, was lying. Across the water, three miles away from the island, the mainland could be seen. One of the two men wore the dress of a soldier. The other was a tall, well-built man, old and bald-headed, but erect and commanding in presence. He was speaking curtly to the soldier.

'You will be in Rome in two days. On the third day the Senate will meet. You will send messengers to me at once by road. Lose no time. You will also give the word for the fire-signals to be lit as soon as my orders have been carried out. He —' he nodded towards one of the men behind — 'will see to the beacons and you will give him the word. I must know at once. You have all the papers — my letter to the Senate, your letter of appointment, my order to the Treasury? Good! Farewell.' He turned to another of the group. 'You have the ships prepared on the coast — with the men on board? Be ready to start in two days' time — at any minute. You may get no further notice. Farewell.' He watched as the men got into the boat and were rowed away to the Campanian coast. Then he turned and, followed by the others, walked steadily to the woods that fringed the coast and through them to the top of the cliffs, striding with his head thrust stiffly forward, thoughtful, his face revealing no inward agitation. On the cliff he stopped for some moments watching the boat now well on its way to the mainland. Then he beckoned to the others, his intimates, and when they came about him, went over his plans with them once more, betraying the anxieties which tormented him. 'In three days at the outside we should know. The beacons will tell us. If things go ill, the ships and men are there. All must be ready; we may have to start at a moment's notice.' They assented respectfully and fell in again behind him as he set off with the same slow stride towards his villa on the cliffs.

He was the Emperor Tiberius, now in his seventy-second year, who had just despatched to Rome Sertorius Macro.

On the mainland cavalry were waiting for Macro. They set out at once. Fresh horses, already arranged for, were provided at short intervals as they advanced rapidly northwards along the Appian Way. From time to time men were detached to set up a

beacon on a neighbouring hill and were told under what conditions they were to set fire to it. Macro timed his progress so that he would arrive in Rome during the darkness of night. He hoped to escape notice altogether. In the daytime the arrival of a man of his importance, known to be an intimate of the Emperor and to have come straight from him in Capreae, would have caused great excitement. But even if his approach became known, as it probably would, to Sejanus, there was no reason why his purpose, which he kept rigidly to himself, should be suspected. Most people would think that, if he had a special mission at all from the Emperor, it might well be to ask the Senate to confer on Sejanus the tribunician power. He sent a messenger ahead with his instructions. The man was to visit one of the two Consuls, Memmius Regulus, and warn him that he must be at home on the night of the 17th in order to receive Macro, who would give him orders from the Emperor which affected the safety of the State; he must also divulge nothing about Macro's coming. If, however, rumour got about, he should spread the idea that the Emperor was at last going to confer on Sejanus the final honour which had been so long expected.

The same night, Macro's arrival in the city was reported to Sejanus by his agents. Hoping as he did every day to receive the coveted distinction from the Emperor, he expected that Macro would call on him during the night, either to announce the news or at least to report what had brought him to Rome. Macro, however, was busy elsewhere. Having visited Regulus, he went on to confer with Laco, the man who commanded the night-watch in the city. He spent much time with him.

The Senate was to meet at an early hour in the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill, so the Senators were in the streets with the dawn. The report that an envoy from the Emperor was in Rome, that he had arrived unexpectedly and by night, had spread quickly among all those who, from their politics or wealth or social or official standing, were interested in what might come of it. Some had sent slaves or freedmen to carry the news to their friends. Some had gone themselves to have a word about it. All knew that whatever message Macro carried, the Consuls would lay it before the Senate that morning, but no one knew what it would contain or whom it would touch. It might be

honours for one man, death for another, with nothing certain except that the Senators would do whatever they thought the Emperor desired. Among the first on the scene was Sejanus, surrounded, as usual, by friends, retainers and guards. Sextus Cornelius and Aulus were in attendance on him. Sejanus stopped outside the Temple and talked with his friends, greeting each newcomer. He had heard that Macro was expected at any moment with a letter from the Emperor to the Consuls and he delayed in order to speak with him. He was sure Tiberius's envoy must at least seek him out before the sitting opened and say something to him about the nature of his mission; it would be an insult if Macro ignored the second man in the State, the equal, as many thought, and as the Senate itself had sometimes hinted, of the Emperor himself. When Macro arrived he looked round the assembled throng, saluting an acquaintance here and there, until he saw Sejanus. Then he went straight to him and gave him a greeting that was at once cordial and respectful. He drew Sejanus aside, spoke to him for a few moments, nodded in answer to something that Sejanus asked him and, after another grave salute, left him in order to greet other friends. Sejanus was at once surrounded by his supporters who, when he told them what Macro had said to him, pressed round him excitedly, and were to be heard congratulating him, some of them hailing him and Tiberius as twin Caesars, others greeting him as Caesar, affecting to forget Tiberius. As the throng slowly moved off towards the Temple, with Sejanus in the centre triumphantly escorted, some of its members broke off to spread the news, while other Senators, on hearing it, made haste to reach Sejanus, or to get as close to him as they could, or at least to make sure that their congratulations were heard, if not by him, by those who were nearest to him, those who might tell him about it, those who might have the greatest influence with him. And so, surrounded by cheering Senators, and applauded by the populace, Sejanus entered the Temple. He had been informed by Macro that Tiberius would that morning ask the Senate to confer on him the tribune's power, which meant that beyond all doubt he was to be the next Emperor.

As soon as Sejanus and the Senators had gone in Macro went to the officer commanding the Praetorians who guarded the

Temple while the Senate was sitting. He produced and showed to this officer two documents, then gave him certain orders. After this, he himself entered the Temple and placed in Regulus's hands the letter which he had brought from the Emperor. Then, with his escort, he rode away.

Publius Antonius had listened eagerly to all the rumours of these days. He had been informed by Thyrsus, who picked up all the news, that an envoy from Capreae was reported to be approaching Rome and that the meeting of the Senate on the next day was expected to bring a decision. 'Bring a decision?' said Publius when he heard the phrase, 'that might mean anything, like an ambiguous oracle, but I know what they mean.' He still wished that Sejanus was dead, but at the same time he felt that the coming announcement would justify his compulsion of Metella and confirm before Roman opinion the wisdom of his judgment. He was up before dawn and while he drank a glass of hot wine, and dipped strips of bread in it, he read with pleasure a poem praising the simple life. 'Listen,' he said to Pericles, who was attending on him personally, 'the worthy Horace knew what was good on an October morning. "I want bread", he says, "which is now pleasanter than honeyed cakes".'

'Does he say anything, sir, about dipping the bread in the best Caecuban wine?'

'Pericles, you make fun of me. But I know the reason. You are trying to hide your ignorance of the poem.'

'No, sir, you will find, if you continue to the end, that the poet says that under a humble roof one may outstrip princes and a prince's friends.'

'An apt thought for this morning, Pericles, considering what we are likely to hear in the Senate. And sensible, too; I would not myself choose to be either Tiberius or young Gaius or Sejanus. Let us be going.'

Their study of Horace had slightly delayed them, so that Publius was a little late when, accompanied by some of his slaves, he approached the Temple. As he reached the entrance the Praetorians who had been posted round the building were moving away. This made no impression on him; he supposed that it was routine. He entered and his escort returned home.

Nearly two hours later Publius re-entered his house. He had

been almost running. He was breathless, with heaving chest, his face red and twitching. Two slaves who were just inside the entrance stared at him with amazement. He could scarcely get his words out. 'Tell your mistress to come at once, and the young mistress too — and Pericles and Thyrsus. Quick! At once!'

He was hurrying into the house when he stopped suddenly, went back to the door and stood there listening. Distant shouting could be heard and a murmur as of many voices. Then he hurried to his own room. Metella was already there and the two slaves arrived at once. He silenced Metella with a gesture and a curt 'Wait!' when she would have questioned him. Then, when Caecilia entered, he made a visible effort to control himself, but his voice trembled and he spoke in short, agitated phrases as he said—

'It's Sejanus! The Emperor has denounced him. He's arrested — he's in prison. They don't know whether the Praetorians will rise and free him. Macro is with them. He's their new Prefect. He brought his letter of appointment with him. He brought another letter, too, promising them money. They may rise all the same. Sejanus thought he had made sure of them. There's to be another meeting of the Senate this afternoon. We shall know better by then what's happening. I don't know what they'll do with him. Do you hear the shouts?' They listened and the murmur in the city was growing. 'That's the mob,' said Publius. 'The growling, snarling mob! It was gathering when I came here. It was shouting against Sejanus. If the guards don't turn out soon to help him, he's done.'

Caecilia put her hand on his shoulder — 'Sit down, Publius,' she said. 'You're exhausted. Rest for a minute, my dear, and then tell us what happened. It will be all right.'

Publius held out his hands to her. They were shaking, but he was becoming calmer. 'Yes, it will be all right, I hope,' he said. 'I'm a bit frightened, though I've less cause to be than some of them.' He spoke to Metella. 'I think, my dear, that the Praetorians and the mob between them are going to decide whether or not you are to marry Aulus.' He gulped and smiled at her affectionately. 'I hope they will come to a right decision.' He asked for water and then, leaning forward in his chair, he said—

'This is what happened. The big hall of the Temple was crowded. Every Senator in Rome except the sick and the crippled^d was there. I haven't seen such an attendance since the day when the Senate voted that Sejanus should be Consul this year together with the Emperor. When I went in routine business was being taken — appointments in Spain or something like that — but scarcely anything could be heard because of the conversation and the noise made by the coming and going of those who went one after another to congratulate Sejanus. His relatives and his nearest friends crowded the benches round him. There are some Senators who read books while the House is assembling or sometimes even after business has begun. Sometimes I do myself. But there was nothing of that to-day. Everybody was ready for a demonstration of applause as soon as the great news was given. Some of the Senators were already repeating 'Sejanus! Sejanus!' in a solemn, happy chant. He himself received the congratulations with quiet confidence. When at last the formal business was over and the Consul, Regulus, rose with a document in his hand there was loud cheering. It started again when he said that he had a letter from the Emperor. Then you should have seen them turn silent and stiffen to attention, as the crowd at the arena does when the wild beasts are let in.'

'It was a typical Tiberius letter. It began with half a dozen things that were no matter. We were all a little bored, wondering how long it would take him to come to the point, and in parts of the House talking began again. Then suddenly there was a reference to Sejanus, not too pleasant. The letter went off to another topic, then it touched Sejanus with a more pointed criticism. There was some uneasiness at this, because Regulus seemed to be reading the complaints with deliberate emphasis, but still we all remembered the snubs that the Emperor had sometimes administered to Sejanus without withdrawing his favour. But when the letter went on and on with nothing friendly to Sejanus, but increasing reproaches and growing asperity, the House began to be perplexed. Sejanus himself was not embarrassed. Having experienced more than anyone the caprice of his master, he was less perturbed than most. Then two things happened. Some Senators who had been standing near the doorway began whispering together; they came in and, sitting

down, spoke in their neighbours' ears. The report spread rapidly through the Senate that the Praetorians had been withdrawn and that the night-watch under Laco had drawn a tight cordon round the Temple with guards at every entrance. At the same time the Emperor's letter reached a point at which he declared that he felt his own personal safety threatened and that one of the Consuls must go to Capreae to protect him on his way to Rome. Then there was a terrible silence. Everyone remembered how, three years before, when the Emperor had complained that his life was in peril and that he was afraid of treachery, he already intended the death of Agrippina and Nero; everyone remembered how, one year later, he had sent a message attacking those two without saying what he wanted done, and had then been furiously angry because the Senate had not taken the immediate vengeance that he desired though he would not ask for it. Now they heard the same obscurity in words, but they knew well this time what was expected of them. A murmur of pained protest against the Emperor's fears swelled among them. Some of those sitting by Sejanus rose in a casual way and sauntered off to other seats. Some of the high officers of State moved simultaneously towards him. They took station between him and the doors, lest he should think to quit the building in order to find the friends on whom he could rely. Regulus must have arranged this with them beforehand. The reading of the letter still went on, its tenor unchanged. The meaning was clear enough, but even yet no one knew whether it would end with a clear demand for punishment and if so, what this would be. At last the letter came to an end with the Emperor ordering that Sejanus should be put under arrest. At that same moment there was a bustle at the entrance doors and Laco himself was seen to be standing there. Then almost the whole House broke out against Sejanus — those who had suffered or feared to suffer at his hands; those who envied or hated him; those who, having been most servile to him, were afraid that they would be marked down for vengeance. He himself sat as if stunned, unable to realize that this had befallen him, regarding stupidly his own loneliness and the malicious, frightened, gloating faces now everywhere confronting him. Regulus had to summon him by name three times before he understood. Then, rising slowly to his feet, he advanced to the

Consul. Instantly he found Laco beside him. Regulus asked only one Senator to give his opinion whether Sejanus should not be put under arrest. He received the expected answer — and that too he had arranged. And then they took Sejanus off to prison.'

Publius stopped; all his limbs began to tremble. Metella ran to him and sat by him and stroked his hands. 'Wait, father,' she said, 'tell us presently. There is no hurry if the Senate does not meet again till this afternoon.'

'No,' he said, 'I will finish. Only an hour ago they were crazy with excitement over him, cheering and fawning on him. Now I saw him being dragged away. Regulus was on one side of him and Laco on the other. But there was a great crowd of them all round him, taunting him, cursing him, hustling each other to get at him, striking him, crying out that he should die. The worst were those whose kinsmen or friends he had destroyed, and those also who, being known as his greatest flatterers, now dreaded punishment. As soon as they were out of the building part of the night-watch moved up and formed an escort, keeping off the crowds that were streaming in from every side, all apparently informed of what was afoot, screaming, booing, heaping execrations on Sejanus. I spent a few minutes talking to my friends and then I went to look for Sextus Cornelius. I found that he and others who were intimates of Sejanus — most of them much more so than he — were holding a meeting of their own to decide what they should do. Some were panic-stricken, all feared the worst. They could not discover what Regulus intended nor what instructions he had from Macro, nor did they know — and on this everything depended — what the Praetorians would do. They sent envoys to the Praetorian Camp and these returned saying that everything seemed to be quiet, that they could learn nothing about what was happening, and that they had been almost driven out when they persisted in their inquiries. So they came away.'

As Publius came to an end, Aulus Cornelius was announced. He was angry and determined. He gave no greetings but spoke at once to Publius. 'My father sent me to tell you that he sees no hope. The soldiers have been bribed —'

'The example was set seventy years ago,' said Publius. 'Now perhaps it will become the custom and Roman soldiers will make

and unmake Emperors for money. But, after all, the Praetorians should obey the Emperor.'

'I would have outbid him,' said Aulus violently. 'I urged my father to get Sejanus's friends to offer the Praetorians twice what Macro offered. I urged that if the Praetorians did not move against us, we should storm the prison, release Sejanus and fly to those legions that would have welcomed him. But they are old women, waiting until their throats are cut.' He stopped, looking at the others in the room and said — 'Publius Antonius, I have something private to say to you.' They went out of the room and Aulus said — 'I want you to agree that Metella and I shall be married now without delay. There is no telling what will happen and since we were to be betrothed it would be well to make sure in time that nothing goes amiss.'

'What will happen to Sejanus this afternoon,' asked Publius, 'if the guards do not rescue him? What will happen to his friends and relatives? What might happen — what might not happen — to Metella if she were married and a member of your family?'

'She has been promised to me.'

'She has not been promised to you,' said Publius. 'There is no promise until the betrothal. She is not promised to anyone. But nothing can be done, nothing at all, until we see what happens later on to-day. How do we know whether Sejanus will even be alive to-night?'

'That makes no difference. I want Metella for my wife whether Sejanus lives or dies, and as long as I myself am alive I shall demand that she belong to me. I shall hold her to the promise that her father made.'

'Perhaps we had better find out first,' said Publius, 'whether any of us is likely to have much interest in the future. Be reasonable, my boy. If Sejanus is finished, your whole family is in danger. If he is not, there will be civil war and you and your family will be fighting against Caesar. Come with me. I am going back to discover what is happening. I shall find Lucius Pactus and send him to see his father at the Praetorian Camp.'

'I must find my father. If only the Praetorians would rise! Scum that they are. After all Sejanus has done for them!'

As they left the room together they came on Caecilia and Metella in the hall. Aulus spoke to Metella with a cool politeness:

'I have been telling your father that we should be married at once, lest what is happening prevents us, but he thinks that it would be better to discover first whether Sejanus is to be murdered and so no longer to be feared by him.'

Caecilia did not answer. Metella said gravely — 'I hope your father and mother will come to no harm, Aulus.'

He shrugged his shoulders — 'If the great Roman people tastes blood, at whose blood will it stop? Listen to it hastening to the feast!' They could hear the noise of many feet running past the house and exultant, eager voices shouting the names of Tiberius and Sejanus. All Rome was on the move. Aulus went out, striding away by himself.

Publius returned at midday. Lucius Paetus had gone to the camp and found his father, who told him that the Praetorians were remaining quietly under Macro's control. They had held meetings all the morning. Their inclination to believe those who told them that Sejanus had been plotting revolt against the Emperor became conviction when they heard from their tribunes about the promised money. The tribunes, said Plotius, were to receive large grants, and the Emperor's special favour. All the strong points of the city were guarded under the orders of Regulus. There was no sign of opposition from any quarter. The streets were in the hands of a wild mob which hurried from one place to another searching out, throwing down and breaking up the statues of Sejanus which servility had set up in recent years. As they smashed the statues to pieces they demanded that the man himself should be given up to them. Agents sent by Tiberius's henchmen were busy inciting them to violence. No one knew for certain what Regulus and his friends would propose when the Senate met in the afternoon, but they were completely masters of the city and would do whatever the Emperor had told Macro must be done. Sextus Cornelius had told him, Publius said, that Sejanus's party would not attend the afternoon session; they might be asked to vote on a proposal for Sejanus's execution; they themselves might well be the next victims. Some of them would have liked to leave Rome, but flight would only make their fate more certain. They were spending their time in their houses, or in one another's houses, going over the events of the morning again and again, discussing the wild rumours that

reached them, lamenting, protesting, threatening the impossible, helplessly waiting for whatever was to happen.

As Publius was leaving again for the Senate in the afternoon; Caecilia asked him — 'If anything happens to Sejanus, others will suffer with him?'

'Yes, his family, his relatives, his principal supporters. It may be death or exile.'

'Sextus and Aelia Memmia and Aulus?'

'They may, but in politics Sextus has never counted for as much as he himself thinks.'

'Ourselves — Metella?'

'There is a danger. It is possible. But many people know that Metella was refusing to consent and that I only yielded under pressure — let me say threats — from Sejanus. I have done what I could to make that known in the right quarters. But if all this happens, which now seems probable, we must take immediate steps to show that we have no connection of any kind with Sejanus or his party.'

'How, father?' asked Metella.

'By marrying you to Lucius, my dear. That is the only convincing thing that we can do. And the sooner the better. I shall come straight back from the Senate and, if it is all over with Sejanus, I shall send for Lucius.'

The Senate met, but this time in another temple close to the jail where Sejanus lay. Publius was back with the news within an hour. They followed him to his room. He nodded to them as though he had only to confirm what they knew, and said — 'He's dead. They've executed him. Everything was clear as soon as we met. The jail and the temple were surrounded by troops, who kept back the howling riff-raff. The Senate' — he smiled contemptuously — 'were no better. They shouted almost as loud. The death-sentence was proposed immediately and carried by acclamation. Some of them would have offered to be the executioners if they had had the chance. The magistrates went straight to the jail — I believe that Macro and Laco were there already — and Sejanus was strangled. His body has been thrown out on the Gemonian Stairs. The rabble are already there maltreating it. They say it is to be left there for some days. There will be others there to keep it company before to-night.'

'Whose, Publius?'

'Not Sextus Cornelius and his family, father?'

'Perhaps not — we will hope not, but certainly Sejanus's family and those who stood closest to him. And some, perhaps, against whom Caesar — and others — have a grudge. Some old scores will be paid off.'

'What was Sejanus charged with, father. You have never said.'

'Because I don't know, my dear. No one does. The Emperor did not say — some say he found Sejanus plotting with the legions, some that he found him making false accusations against Gaius in order to ruin him as he had already ruined Agrippina, Nero and Drusus. Or it might be that everything fitted together, that the Emperor saw Sejanus as the enemy of his house, as the subtle schemer, the ambitious soldier, the implacable persecutor, and was himself afraid. I think that is as likely as any other story. I think he was afraid. Now about Metella's marriage. I shall send word to Lucius to come and see me to-morrow, and after that, no delay!'

'When shall you tell Sextus and Aulus, father?'

'When I see whether they are still at liberty, my dear. It may not be so easy to communicate with them after to-day, so I shall wait. I wish them no serious harm, but it will make things easier if they are in custody, and it is very necessary to get on with this marriage. It will be much the best protection for us all — indeed, there is no other. You don't object, Caecilia?'

'To the marriage, Publius? No.'

'Nor you, Metella?'

'No, father, not at all. I may have told you that I like Lucius?'

'You did, and I am glad, because it make things easier. I'm sorry, of course, to have to hurry you —'

'I can put up with that, too, I think.'

'That's satisfactory. I wanted to make sure that you both approved. I wouldn't like to do anything that you thought inadvisable. I'm delighted when your inclination agrees with my policy, with what I think is wise.'

Mother and daughter regarded Publius with grave admiration and then, looking at each other, could not restrain themselves from laughter. Publius, first frowning and then himself smiling, protested — 'I know that I am proved to have been wrong before,

but circumstances — and that ignorant fellow Parmenio — were too much for me. I doubt whether a wiser man than I would have done otherwise. But it is no time for laughing — ’

‘It is for me, father.’

‘Not yet, my dear, but only for a good hope that you and Lucius and we here may yet be happy. But there are terrible things to come, you may be sure. I shall not go out again to-day. I shall send out Pericles and Thyrsus to get the news.’

CHAPTER VII

THE two slaves went out, came back in the early evening and reported; went out again and returned late at night. The city was quiet again, they said. Parties of Praetorians had broken out in the evening to loot and burn; their ardour had soon been repressed. For hours past the magistrates had been going with military escorts, and with the mob in attendance, to the houses of Sejanus’s relatives and principal supporters and seizing them. The prisons were filling. Thyrsus reported on the household of Sextus Cornelius. Sextus himself and Aulus had been arrested. Aelia Memmia was still at liberty; since she had taken no active part in politics it was thought she might escape, but no one knew how far vengeance would go. Pericles had seen her. She had been appealing to the leading members of the Cornelian house, to which her husband belonged, but she found them scared, since Sejanus himself was connected with it. She had also gone to intercede with the Consul, Memmius Regulus, a connexion of her own. He was much too busy with executions and arrests to see her. He was also much too wary to be seen with anyone who was connected with Sejanus as well as with himself. He sent out word by his son that by paying such visits she endangered herself and possibly him also, that she should stay quietly at home, seeing no one, and that she could be sure that justice would be done. She had told him all this, Thyrsus said, and herself remained unshaken; she had hinted that at one time Memmius Regulus had been anxious to ingratiate himself with Sejanus, that he had used her for the purpose, and he would not now forget, she

thought, how much she knew, and could divulge, about him.

Pericles informed them of the end which had befallen the family of Sejanus. Some things he had been told; some things he himself had seen. The magistrates were determined that this time the Emperor should recognize that they were intelligent enough to know what he wanted and loyal enough to provide it. Sejanus's eldest son who, being warned, had taken refuge with a friend, was hunted down and killed. There were a younger son and a girl, both of them mere children. They were hurried off to death. Their bodies, too, had been exposed on the Gemonian Stairs to the insults of the crowd. The story was, said Pericles, that the girl, not knowing what was intended nor of what she was accused, had pleaded with the executioner that if he would give her only a slight punishment, she would behave better in the future. Together with her brother she had been strangled.

Publius frowned. 'The girl, too?' he said. 'That should not have been. That is forbidden. It is a Roman rule that a virgin cannot be put to death.'

'She was put to death, sir, but they say the rule was kept.'

They looked at one another in a horrified silence until Metella broke out, 'Oh, no! that cannot be true. He cannot mean that, father. It would be beyond all words if that was done. But if it was done, the cause is that foul beast of an Emperor, who for all these years has himself lifted up Sejanus to lord it over us and then in a day turns against him and murders even his innocent children.' Caecilia and Pericles remained motionless, their faces rigid at the story, while Thyrsus gave an effusive, smiling approval to Metella's denunciation. Publius shook his head repeatedly as though he were dazed and trying to reject some shocking idea that must be beyond belief. He looked pitifully from his wife to his daughter and then back again. Suddenly he said — 'Well, we have bettered Cicero. At this feast there are no leavings.'

'What do you mean, Publius?' said his wife.

But Publius remained brooding in silence.

'Do you know what he means?' she said to Pericles.

'I think so, madam. After Julius Caesar was murdered, Cicero wrote to his friends saying that he wished he had been invited to that "beautiful banquet" because there would have

been no "leavings", meaning that he would have murdered Mark Antony as well.'

'We could teach poor Cicero something,' said Publius. 'We murder the young children, too. Let us talk of something else.'

Publius saw Lucius next morning, and on the following day Lucius and Metella were formally betrothed. Publius was determined that the event should be known as widely as possible. He had been forced by circumstances into a situation which had proved to be extremely dangerous and, now that circumstances had turned round, he felt no shame in turning round himself; indeed, he had to turn with speed and energy if they were to be safe. He sent out many invitations and received many polite refusals, for it was a time of great excitement, some being expectant and others deeply anxious; there were those who feared to associate with one who was known to have intended a marriage alliance with the party of the dead 'traitor' — for so officially Sejanus now was — and there were those, the Cornelii and their friends, who were prepared as soon as they had the chance to resent his desertion of them. Aelia Memmia sent Publius a bitter letter. Since her husband and son could not speak for themselves, she said, she would tell him for them that he was treacherous, but perhaps in these uncertain times he might yet pay for the wrong that he proposed to do. Publius was hurt that anyone should be so unreasonable, but persevered, conscious of his good motives. Their near relatives and good friends came to the betrothal. Tullus, the cousin, and his family were there and Publius made much of them, especially of the small children. When the ceremony was over he said that he had gifts for all the guests, but that they must be distributed by lot so that everyone would have an equal chance and everything would be a great surprise. The odd thing was that the gifts all went to the right people. The baby, to whom the lots might easily have assigned a pair of dumb-bells or the comedies of Plautus, for both were there, received a rattle. Of the other four children, the younger boy got a belt with dummy sword, the other a stuffed ball and a whip; of the two girls one received silver hairpins and the other combs. Lollia Claudia was given a lamp with several wicks. She said that Pericles must come and read poetry to her by the light of it all night. To Metella went a wallet which seemed to

be stuffed with money and to Lucius not only a bookcase but a large wooden money-box. Publius said he would need it when he married such an extravagant girl. There was much curiosity about what the lots would assign to Pericles and Thyrsus. Fortune made no mistake. Pericles received a large case for writing materials with pens and parchment paper already in it, Thyrsus wool-lined slippers and a wine-cup. Tullus's children, clutching their presents tight as they walked home, told their parents that the gifts could not have been distributed more skilfully if the kind Publius himself had arranged them.

Lollia warmly congratulated the betrothed on their good fortune. 'I won't say I expected all this, but I sometimes wondered how long my illustrious kinsman would put up with an upstart like Sejanus. The more he favoured the man, the more we ought to have suspected what was coming; I've never known anyone better than Tiberius at concealing what was in his mind.' Then, as Pericles was passing them, she stopped him and said — 'Here, my learned man, tell me, has your clever Horace anything to say about your young mistress and her betrothed to-day?'

'Yes, madam, this — it's in the "Odes" — "The man tenacious of his purpose for the sake of what is right is not shaken from his firm mind by the frenzy of a mob ordering what is bad nor by a tyrant's threatening face."'

'That's Metella all right,' said Lollia, 'and I hope it's you, too, Lucius. She deserves it of you. I must say that if I had that slave' — she nodded at the departing Pericles — 'I would make him a freedman the next day. Why doesn't your father free him, Metella? But, of course, that's not my business. Now I must be going. If I were you two, I'd get married quickly. "Love to-day", was always my motto, for you never know if you'll get a chance to-morrow.'

During the next weeks reports flowed in of the death or exile inflicted on the party of Sejanus. Nothing was heard of any threat to the household of Publius, who was cheered by the private congratulations of his friends. Most of the Senators were celebrating the fall of Sejanus in every way that they thought might gratify the Emperor. They decided that the day of his death should be remembered every year with horse-races and hunting of wild beasts; the festival was even to be under the

direction of the priests in order to emphasize its sacred character. They proposed special celebrations for the birthday of the Emperor. They begged him to accept the title of Father of his Country. They hastened to confer gifts of money and distinctions of place and dress on Macro and Laco, the Emperor's executioners, but these two had the good sense to decline. The Emperor himself, so the news spread, had waited on the cliffs at Capreae watching in anguish for the beacon fires that would blaze at the happy news. Exultant at the messages from Macro and Regulus, he was contemptuous of Senate and people. He refused to receive either a deputation from Rome which came to wait on him or even Regulus the Consul who came at his own request to conduct him to Rome. It was said that his bitterness was due to dreadful news. Sejanus's divorced wife, Apicata, when she heard that her young children had been slaughtered, determined to die by her own hand. But first she wrote a letter to Tiberius telling him how his son Drusus had come to his end. He had been poisoned, she wrote, by his wife Livilla and her lover Sejanus in order to remove the obstacle to their marriage and succession to Tiberius's supreme power. Livilla paid for this disclosure with her life.

One day, while Publius and his family, Lucius being with them, were talking of these reports, Aulus unannounced walked in on them. He greeted them civilly, though ignoring Lucius, and when, partly to hide their embarrassment, they plied him with questions, he said with a shrug — 'It might be worse. My father is relegated to Patmos, some wretched little island off the coast of Asia. Perhaps he'll make it famous. My mother is not affected. I myself am relegated to Cyprus. We keep our citizenship and property. I suppose we are lucky. I am ordered to leave Rome within three days,' he said to Publius. 'May I have a word with you. I have a favour to ask.' In Publius's room he explained that he wanted to have the slave Thyrsus, whom he knew well, sold to him. He had property in Italy that must be looked after while he was away and Thyrsus could also keep an eye on the interests of Aelia Memmia. He proposed, when he had acquired Thyrsus, to free him in order to give him authority as his manager. Thyrsus would travel to Cyprus, when necessary, to see him. Publius said that he would give, not sell, the slave, but Aulus

insisted that he would either pay or withdraw his request, whereon Publius gave way. Thyrsus was summoned and informed. Publius told him that he would join his new master some time on the next day. They must look through the estate accounts before he left. Thyrsus expressed to Publius his regret that he should be leaving and to Aulus his pleasure at the thought of serving him. Aulus stopped him with a curt, 'That will do,' and said to Publius that there was something else he wished to say to all of them. He added to Thyrsus, 'You had better come with us and hear what I have to say. It will concern you in the future'. Publius, on his dignity, said he would send for Pericles.

When they were all together Aulus said — 'I am going to Cyprus, but some day I shall come back. I want to explain what I shall do when that day comes. You have promised Metella to me, Publius Antonius. You could have refused if you had had the courage, but you had not and I deny your right to go back on your word —'

'It was given in fear of Sejanus,' protested Publius, 'and for no other reason. Fear of what he might do if I refused. Now he is dead and can do nothing. So I am free and Metella can marry whom she pleases.'

Aulus stiffened. 'Metella also,' he said, looking at her, 'promised to marry me.'

'I did not,' she said. 'You mean — I know I wrote you a letter but —' she saw that the others were looking at her in some astonishment. Lucius Paetus was red with irritation.

'He refused to let Iris go,' she said indignantly, 'unless I promised him what he wanted. So I let him think that I was giving way, but I was not. He tried to get the better of me, and he failed. As though I would marry him!' She took Lucius's hands in hers.

'Well, well,' said Publius, 'it is all over now. You cannot expect, Aulus, things being what they are, that Metella should marry you, promise or no promise. We must let bygones be bygones. We all wish you well, my dear boy, and we hope that you will soon come back again, and both your father and mother be here to welcome you. I am sure all will be for the best. We shall be hearing of you.'

'You mistake,' said Aulus. 'I give up none of my rights and

when I come back I shall exact them. If Metella marries someone else' — for a moment he turned a mocking look on Lucius — 'it will make no difference to my claims. They will remain unchanged, though there may, by then, be interest to pay as well as principal.' He spoke directly to Metella. 'Do not marry anyone else, Metella; you would be wasted on anyone but me. We should make good partners. But, of course, you can always join me in Cyprus at any time you choose.' He laughed at the angry Lucius, gave a courteous salute to the others and withdrew, followed by Thyrsus.

Outside the room Thyrsus told Pericles what was happening to him. 'I'm glad,' said Pericles, 'that you are to be freed. It will console you for leaving the master and mistress.'

'I hate them,' said Thyrsus simply. 'I hate all masters and mistresses. So should you. Who gives them the right? We are as good as they — and often better, you soft fool!'

Pericles was amazed. 'I never knew you felt that way about them. I don't believe you do. You're a queer fellow, always joking. And your new master who's going to free you — you're grateful to him, aren't you?'

'I don't like the way he spoke to me just now. He'd better be careful. I'm better-born than any Cornelius. I shall give him a trial. But, believe me, there are some things I won't stand, as sure as my name's Thyrsus.'

'“Oh, thou to be feared with thy terrible Thyrsus!”' said Pericles, smiling.

'What do you mean — “terrible Thyrsus”? Something more out of poor old Horace?'

'Well, yes, it is. It's really addressed to the god Bacchus, with his mighty wand.' Pericles smiled affectionately on his comrade.

Thyrsus was delighted. 'Bacchus, to be feared with his Terrible Thyrsus!' he cried. 'That's the tune! My new master had better behave himself or he'll find out about it! Thank you for the word, Pericles. I'll not forget it.' He elevated an imaginary wand into the air and went off shouting — 'Hurrah for Horace! Pericles the Poet! Thyrsus the Terrible!'

On the far side of the house was a small room which was assigned to the two principal slaves. As Thyrsus approached this, still chanting, he ran into Iris, who was carrying flowers to her

mistress's room. On the instant he threw his arms about her, whirled her round and swept her along and into his room. The flowers scattered as they went. There he stopped and, when she struggled, held her more tightly and addressed her with mock solemnity. 'Do you know who I am? Thyrsus the Terrible! The good Pericles —' his tone was mocking — 'says so. You have heard that I am going to the young master Aulus? I would like you to come with me.'

She pushed at him with her hands and threw her head back to keep away from him.

'You won't come?' he said. 'Well, that's a mistake. But it doesn't really matter because I'm going to be freed — Thyrsus the freedman! — and then I shall buy you as a slave for myself. Oh, they'll have to sell you to me. They won't be able to refuse me anything. We know too much about the people here — the noble Aulus and I. They'll have to do as we tell them before long!'

'They won't!' She had ceased to struggle and was watching him. 'Your master Aulus can do nothing. He's banished to Asia — I know all about it.'

'And while he is in Asia, who will manage his affairs at home? Who will help him to get all he wants and so get all he wants for himself? THYRSUS — the famous freedman!'

A flash of illumination came to Iris. 'You've always helped him, haven't you, even in this house?'

'The clever girl!' he said. 'And everything will be neatly arranged — the proud young mistress Metella for the insolent Aulus and the beautiful slave Iris for the deserving Thyrsus!'

'I shall tell my mistress everything,' said Iris, 'and you will never be allowed to come to our house again.'

'I shall come back to "our" house,' said Thyrsus, 'and I shall be well received. For my young master will leave powerful friends behind to watch his interests while he is away, and he knows so much about what Publius Antonius and his daughter have said and done that she will be glad to do whatever he wants, and you will belong to me whether you like it or not — the slave of the splendid freedman Thyrsus.'

As he spoke he ran his hands down her arms and thighs. She struck him in the face with her right hand and tried to spring

away. He seized her by the wrists and crushed them together so that she gasped with the pain, but she made no sound. Then suddenly there were steps outside and the voices of women slaves chattering loudly about the flowers strewn on the floor. Thyrsus let go and Iris slipped through the door. He followed her at once and, taking her affectionately by the arm, said to the slaves, 'It was all my fault. Iris was nice to me about my being freed and in thanking her I — well, you know how these things happen — we somehow managed between us to spill the flowers.' The women laughed and wished that he would thank them, too. They thought what a pity it was that so playful and friendly a companion as Thyrsus was leaving them. Iris hurried away.

In the family room Metella and Lucius were wondering how Aulus would settle his affairs, by what route he would go to Cyprus, and what would be his chances of being recalled to Rome.

'I wish he were dead,' said Lucius. 'I'm afraid of him.'

'I don't wish him dead,' said Metella, 'and I'm not afraid of him. Nor are you, Lucius. He can't hurt us so long as we are together and he can never separate us.'

'I know, Metella. I didn't really mean I was afraid. All the same, Rome being what it is and will be, he would be better dead.'

CHAPTER VIII

ON the next afternoon Publius was in his study. He had been going over accounts with Thyrsus and had said good-bye to him. He was looking at some figures which had puzzled him and, now that Thyrsus was no longer there to make them seem simple, were puzzling him still more. At that moment Thyrsus himself, whom he had not expected to see again, came in with curious news. Parmenio was in the house asking to see Publius.

'He says his business is urgent, and secret. He has come alone, without any of his usual attendants, and when I told him I was not sure that you would want to see him he said that his visit touched your interests and even your safety. He must see you and, until he did, he would refuse to go.'

'Oh, but I want to see him,' replied Publius. 'Indeed I want to see him.' He looked pleased and grim and determined all together. 'There's no one I can think of that I want to see more than the wisest of Africa's sons, the teller of truth to the Romans. You will keep him waiting for a time, Thyrsus, and then bring him in. Send Pericles to me, will you?'

When Pericles came, Publius said to him — 'Parmenio is here, Pericles, asking to see me. He has come this time without his retinue. What do you make of it? What brings him here?'

'A bad conscience, don't you think, sir? Guilt makes him solitary. Shall you do him the honour of seeing him, may I ask?'

'I shall do him that honour. I shall consider his apologies. I think, Pericles, that, as the vulgar say, we are about to receive a little of our own again.'

'Do you mean the fee, sir? Do you think that he is likely to return it?'

'I had not thought of the money, though he certainly ought to. I cannot haggle with the man, but we shall see how he behaves himself. He may himself offer it. If not, I shall leave it to you to recover the money. You can threaten him with exposure. I would have had Thyrsus in, too, but as he is leaving us it would be useless; besides, though I had to release him, I am not pleased that he did not prefer to remain here. I intended myself, of course, to free him at the proper time. Now, please remove the chairs and the stools except one of each. I will take the chair and you the stool, and the mouthpiece of Apollo shall stand while he explains. No mercy, Pericles, to-day! Really, I am almost sorry for the man. Leave that chair where it is and put the stool beside it — that's right. We'll sit down presently. We have some time to wait. I told Thyrsus to keep him kicking his heels for a time. That'll put him in his place, just as the famous doctors do with the best of us when we visit them to seek their advice. Why, the other day, when the Consul, Regulus, himself went to consult the celebrated surgeon from Miletus — you know, Callisthenes — he was kept waiting for an hour although Callisthenes himself had fixed the time. Regulus said his only consolation was that he had an hour in which to nerve himself to hear the fee that he knew Callisthenes would charge. Well, this time I think we have the good Parmenio where we want him, Pericles.

Yes, I think so!’ Publius rubbed his hands together and patted his thighs while he clucked gently in his throat, a gesture of satisfaction which he made in the Senate when he thought that he had scored a controversial gain.

The door opened softly and Parmenio stood there. They had the feeling that he had been close at hand all the time. With a courteous inclination towards Publius — ‘The mouthpiece of Apollo!’ he said. ‘Forgive my intrusion, but I am much pressed for time. I am going on a journey at once and had to see you first.’ When Publius said nothing but looked extremely angry, Parmenio glanced round the room and back to Publius and Pericles sitting side by side. Then, ‘Please don’t trouble about a chair for me,’ he said. ‘This will do.’ He negligently swept aside some books on the table, knocking one off on to the floor, and sat on the table with his left foot on the ground, and his right leg swinging lightly.

‘You should not be so clumsy,’ said Publius. ‘Pericles, pick it up — the Ovid!’

Parmenio had, however, already bent down and picked up the book. ‘Ah, Ovid?’ he said. ‘Yes, I see. A most appropriate book, if I may say so. I don’t wonder you admire it. This is the book, I think, in which the poet talks about the credulous fish.’

Pericles was so used to completing the recollections of his master that he could not miss the chance. ‘Yes, Ovid keeps on saying that the credulity of the fish is such that it trusts even the angler’s hook.’

Then, when he saw his master scowling and Parmenio mirthful, ‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ he said. ‘I was not thinking. I did not realize what he meant. I — the book is not damaged, sir.’ He had taken it up where Parmenio had laid it down and was pretending to examine it closely.

‘Sit down,’ said his master, ‘and stop talking.’ Then to Parmenio: ‘Well?’

‘You are surprised, Publius Antonius, I am sure, to see me here to-day?’

‘I am not. It would have surprised me if you had not come. I have been expecting you ever since events exposed your incompetence. Sejanus was to become Emperor, was he not, mouthpiece of Apollo? The dream didn’t really mean that he was killed,

did it, teller of truth to the Romans? And the lion's head made it certain that he would attain his ambition, didn't it, wisest of Africa's sons? What have you to say for yourself, you rogue? You had better say it quickly, before I lose patience. And presently my slave here will talk to you about the money question.'

'The money question?' Parmenio settled himself more comfortably on the edge of the table. 'But how did you know? That's why I've come to see you.' His voice was smooth.

'Have you come to return me the money?' asked Publius.

'Quite the contrary. I've come to ask you to pay me the fee which I was due to receive from my client Aulus Cornelius, since he refuses to pay it on the ground that the opinion which I gave you did not, in fact, bring about his marriage to your daughter.'

'Your client Aulus!' said Publius. He took some time to comprehend the infamy. 'But *I* was your client. Do you mean to tell me that you took money from another "client" to interpret the dream as he desired?'

'As you, also desired! You will admit, I hope, that you wanted to have your purpose confirmed by me and since Aulus Cornelius had the same end, there was no difficulty. His fee, I may say, was the same as yours. I hope you will think that fair — the same service, the same fee. But now he repudiates the agreement. He hopes to escape because he is being banished. But that is no reason why I should not be paid for my services and I am ~~sure~~ that you will not let me suffer.'

'So you are sure, are you?' Publius was boiling up. 'You swindle me with a lying prophecy, you plunder me of money and you try to blackmail me because you have yourself been bilked. You deserve all you have got. You are for jail, my man. Pericles!'

Parmenio held up an elegant hand as Pericles rose. 'Sit down, slave,' he said, 'or go and get the money!' He turned to Publius again. 'If you will be patient, I will explain why you will pay me what the young man owes me and also why on reflection you will think I am reasonable. You will pay me because you consulted me about Sejanus's prospects of becoming Emperor, of his succeeding or perhaps supplanting the Emperor, and you wanted to know from me when the Emperor would die.'

'I did not,' protested Publius, but he was nervous. 'I did not ask that question.'

'You will remember, I am sure, how you impressed on me — and I indeed on you — the need for secrecy. I for my part remember how I had to ignore your dangerous suggestion. You would still, I am sure, desire me to treat all that you said as confidential, and I myself would prefer, if possible, to do that.'

'No one would believe anything you said against me,' cried Publius angrily. 'You foreign scoundrel! I will have you arrested. You shall lose your life for this.'

Parmenio regarded him calmly. 'I do not deny what you say, Publius Antonius. I might even lose my life but not without your destroying yourself and your family. I, fortunately for myself, have no family.' He meditated for a few seconds. 'Some day, perhaps, you would like to hear the story of my domestic misfortunes, but that must be another day. I have not the leisure now.' Publius, fallen silent, was staring fixedly at him. 'And do not think,' Parmenio added, 'that by doing me any violence you can stop my mouth. If anything should happen to me, there are those who will inform the Consuls that you intended to marry your daughter into Sejanus's party and that you consulted me whether and when Sejanus would become Caesar through the Emperor's death. I admit that I should be in danger even if I explained to them that I had warned you of your crime and fled your house, but nothing, nothing at all, could save you and yours, Publius Antonius. I suggest that you and I should not quarrel. I shall bear you no grudge for what you have said. I understand your irritation.'

Pericles gazed at Parmenio. He was fascinated by such wickedness. And this was the man whom he had recommended to his master. Publius sat for a long time with eyes cast down, thinking. Then he looked up and said to Pericles —

'There is no way of averting this, Pericles?'

'No, sir. It would, I fear, be useless to appeal to his better nature. He is, I think, unscrupulous.'

'Quite, Pericles. I am sure you are right.' Publius rose heavily, said 'I will get the money', and went out. In a few minutes he returned with a bag, the contents of which Parmenio carefully counted. 'I have to take the risk,' said Publius, 'that

you will ask for more.' Parmenio smiled. 'I am going to the East,' he said, 'I am not sure where; possibly to Alexandria. A little pleasure trip. I need a rest from the strain of this terrible city, and I have been fortunate in making a little money lately by the generosity of one or two patrons.' He smiled affably at Publius.

'To the East, to Alexandria!' broke out Publius. 'All you sooth-sayers and astrologers should go there — you should go back where you came from, the whole lot of you that infest Rome, for you are all rogues and quacks and vagabonds. You ought all to be banished.'

Parmenio straightened up a little and said with dignity — 'We have been banished before, and we shall be banished again. But we have come back before and we shall come back again, as often as we are driven out. Rome cannot do without us now, nor we without Rome. You Romans need us to give you fresh excitements. You have lived on conquest and foreign wars and on domestic war, blood-letting and massacre, and you have sunk to the life of slaves beneath a Caesar, so now you seek the spicy stimulants which we bring you from the East. Or you want something and somebody to whet your ambitions and we tell you what lordship in money or in power you may hope to have over your fellow Romans. Or you want some certainty in life, having lost faith in your own gods of hearth and field, and we are here to tell you what the stars destine for you and what your dreams mean — whether you will be Emperor of the world, whether you should put your money into shipping and gladiators, or whether, if it is a woman who consults us, how she can win back her lover. And we, for our part, need Rome, my dear Publius — masterful, conquering Rome. For we, too, must live and where can we live so prosperously as in Rome? Or, I should rather say, *on* Rome — magnificent, luxurious, crumbling Rome whose limbs still powerfully move while she is decaying at the heart. If you don't believe me' — he flicked a hand towards the pile of books — 'read your own Livy or get this solemn slave to tell you what Livy says.'

Pericles opened his mouth to protest at this insolence, but Publius stopped him. 'No, Pericles! The man's a rascal but I must say he's not ignorant. There's too much truth in what he says.' Publius looked at Parmenio almost with respect. 'Livy

does use something like those very words, you know. He says we live in days in which the strength of a once dominant people is working its own ruin.'

'Yes,' said Pericles, 'and that we can now bear neither our vices nor their remedies.'

'That's it,' cried Publius with great satisfaction, 'and that wealth has brought greed with it.'

'Yes, master,' instantly responded Pericles, 'and that overflowing pleasures and unbridled licence have even produced a longing to cause universal ruin.'

As they spoke Parmenio turned from one to the other with a commending smile. 'I see,' he said, 'that you are both well-read. It is a pleasure to talk to such men: they are the salt of Rome. But you made one mistake, Publius Antonius. If, instead of sending for me, you had studied the precepts of your Roman fathers and followed their simple manners —'

Pericles at last, unable to contain himself, leapt up. 'My master does!' he cried. 'He has!'

'Silence, Pericles!' Publius made an impatient gesture. He was thinking that his momentary sympathy with Parmenio's knowledge had gone too far. He addressed him severely. 'Have you finished?'

'I was about to say that I shall not be back in Rome for a long time so that you need not fear further demands from me. Who knows what may not have happened to you and me — and Rome — by the time I return? Do not disturb yourself by unnecessary fears about what I may do. And one thing more. If I should run across the young man Aulus in his banishment and should persuade him to pay my fee, you must allow me to refund the money to you. I cannot take a refusal. That would be only fair.' He respectfully saluted Publius. 'May Apollo, the god of prophecy, protect you as he has to-day and always protected me, his faithful mouthpiece.' He picked up the money bag, gave it a brisk little shake and, saying with great solemnity to Pericles, 'You two must look after each other in this wicked city', departed.

Publius got up and, walking to the window, stood for a time looking out into the garden, behind the house. He brooded so gloomily, from time to time giving a grunt of disgust, that he did not hear Pericles when more than once he asked if he was still

needed. . Presently Publius heard voices. Leaning forward a little, he saw Parmenio and Thyrsus walking from a side-door into the garden. They were arm in arm and laughing. They came to a semicircular stone seat which had been built to face a little statue of Apollo holding his lyre, and Publius burned with indignation when Parmenio, applauded by Thyrsus, made a deep obeisance to the god.

‘You saw that?’ he said to Pericles.

‘Yes, sir, but I can still hardly believe it.’

‘If you had paid as much money as I have, you would believe anything. Look at them now!’

The pair were seated. Parmenio produced the money bag from his robes, poured the coins on to the seat and counted out half of them. Thyrsus pushed them deftly into an empty bag which he had ready and each then tucked his bag away again. Then they rose, faced each other and executed a few steps of a slow dance round the statue, after which, with a dignified ceremonial tread they marched to the garden gate, went through and disappeared.

‘It seems, sir,’ said Pericles, ‘as though we had been deceived in Thyrsus, too.’

Publius looked at him hard. ‘There are some signs of it. Nothing escapes you or me, does it, a year or two too late? I’m beginning to wonder about those figures in Thyrsus’s accounts that puzzled me. I let him convince me, but I didn’t really understand them. Now wait. I have two notes for you to take. I am going to find out the truth at once about this Parmenio.’ Sitting down, he wrote to two friends. He asked Vitellius whether it was true that he had consulted a soothsayer from Egypt called Parmenio, and if so, what he thought of him. He wrote also to one of the city Aediles who was concerned with the conduct of the foreigners in Rome and asked him what, if anything, he knew about Parmenio. Pericles was back within an hour bringing the replies. Vitellius said that there was some confusion in names. The man whom he consulted was Parmenides, a respectable, experienced soothsayer who was giving him great encouragement in some plans he had in hand. He had never himself heard of Parmenio, but he was informed by one of his freedmen that a man of that name was well known in the lower levels of Roman society as being plausible in exploiting the unwary. The

Aedile said that Parmenio was a 'dangerous charlatan' and an 'ingenious impostor' whom he had in fact just ordered to leave Italy at twenty-four hours' notice. 'Have nothing to do with him, my dear Publius,' wrote the Aedile. 'You would, of course, always outwit him, but your reputation might suffer from such bad company.'

Having read these letters out, 'How much,' Publius asked, 'did you yourself know about Parmenio before you and Thyrsus discovered him?'

'Now that I think of it, sir, next to nothing, but Thyrsus suggested everything to me so confidently that I came to think I knew it for myself. I think it was the account of the temple of Apollo and how he carried the message in the Croesus lion on his breast that made it seem so genuine to me. I desire to say, sir, how sorry I am that I should have failed so disgracefully to protect your interests.'

'It is a master's business,' said Publius magnanimously, 'to guide his slaves, to be wary where they are careless, watchful where they are credulous — like fishes, Pericles — and not to blame them for his own mistakes. I do not blame you, Pericles, but myself for my blindness.'

'Thank you, sir. As always, you are too kind to me.'

The next morning Publius went to see Aulus. He found him cold and indifferent. 'Are you going on with the marriage?' said Aulus. 'Then remember that I shall not recognize it. It will not count for me when I return, and some day I shall return.'

Publius urged him to bear no grudge and told him that they would all regard him as a friend if he were willing. Then at last, to lighten the conversation and to cover an uncomfortable retreat, he said, 'At any rate I am glad that you refused to pay that rascal Parmenio his fee, though it was a scurvy trick, you know, to employ him against me.'

Aulus shrugged his shoulders. 'I gained nothing by it,' he said, 'so why worry? But what do you mean about the fee?'

'He extorted from me the money that you promised him. He said that you refused to pay because the betrothal fell through.'

Aulus laughed. 'I paid him,' he said. 'He took care of that.'

'He told me he was going to try and recover the money from you in Cyprus and would then repay me.'

'I paid him part of the fee when I commissioned him and the rest within an hour of his giving you his opinion in your house.'

'Has he gone yet? I shall go after him —'

'Oh, yes, he's gone. But I should leave him alone in future, if I were you. He knows too much about you, don't you think? And so do I. By the way, how much did you pay him?'

When Publius told him, Aulus laughed aloud. 'The cunning dog!' he said. 'That's twice what I paid him! He'll be sore that he didn't charge you three or four times as much. If he'd known you another week, he would have. Well, you must be going, I suppose, but don't forget that Metella is pledged to me and that from the day I come back I shall demand fulfilment of the pledge. Tell the others what I say, for in these uncertain days anything might happen to you and it would be a pity if they did not know what to expect.'

Publius returned thoughtfully home, reported what had passed and hurried on the ceremony. In ten days' time Metella and Lucius were married.

PART TWO



CHAPTER I

METELLA and Lucius lived in the house on the Esquiline Hill with her parents. So long as the friends of Sejanus were still being attacked Publius thought it prudent to have his son-in-law Lucius, quiet, respected, detached from politics, as physical evidence that the household was free from any connexion with the Sejanus 'plot'. At the end of November he thought it would be better still if, with his wife, he left Rome for a time. The City was ceasing to talk so much about Sejanus. The Emperor, at Capreae, was more and more shutting himself off from ordinary society. The malicious, whispering gossip about him took wings to itself. Since nothing was known anything could be said and everything believed. Stories of the sexual licence in which he was said to riot, together with his companions, began to spread. 'With such rich food,' Publius argued, 'my enemies will forget me, and I shall assist them to forget if I disappear into the country. They will see only the industrious Lucius Paetus and his likeable young wife; after a time they will not even wonder whether I am alive.' His wife agreed, 'provided', she said, 'that you do nothing to draw attention to yourself'. Publius replied that he was famous for discretion. Pericles was left behind to keep a watchful eye on the household. Lollia Claudia, who had been immensely gratified by the way in which her fellow Claudian Tiberius had turned on Sejanus, could be relied on to help the young people. Ever since they had been in danger she had taken more and more interest in them. All might, all should, go well.

Publius and Caecilia went to a farm that Publius had lately bought on the coast about thirty miles south of Rome, near Antium. His other villas and farms were all too far from the Capital. He wanted a place from which he could come easily to his duties in Rome: many a public man had been ruined, he

said, by being too far removed from Rome at the moment when great issues were decided. Besides, he wanted to farm, to join in the work, to be the practical tiller of the soil, to make farming pay, to show sceptical fellow-Senators that it could be done. He was a good letter-writer, enjoying himself as he described the farm and the small things of his life. He told Metella how much she would like it when for the first time she came to see the place. He explained that though a farmer laboured hard he must have his relaxations and, besides, there were many wet, cold and snowy days in the winter when there was little to be done outside; a man must therefore read. He had, he said, had a sun-room built on to the farm and he was looking forward to showing it to her and Lucius. It was semicircular, facing south, collecting the winter sun. There he had put his books, far more, so Caecilia said in her letters, than he could possibly read, and there he constantly was, she said, always running off if the weather gave him the slightest excuse to dip into some book or other, or look up this and that or make some notes, pretending that he didn't know how many things there were that the truly conscientious farmer should be doing under cover. 'As soon as I settle down to a good book,' Publius wrote in pretended indignation, 'in comes your mother saying "I thought you were going to mend those wine-jars to-day, Publius. The pitch is all ready for you."' "What about cramming those geese?" "We shan't be able to sell the firewood if you don't chop the sticks." "Or would you rather mend the saddle-harness to-day?" "Or grease the shoes and belts?" "Oh, yes, and could you mix some medicine for the cattle, only don't forget this time that both you and the ox must be standing up or the medicine won't do any good." "And can I have some paste to spread on the floor, there are so many mice about?" "And I'm afraid we've finished that stuff that kills the moths." And then she says sternly, shaking a finger at me, "You know, my dear, here you sit reading, but the expenses of the farm go on just the same!" Bless her heart, she doesn't know it but old Cato warned his Roman farmer of that over two hundred years ago.'

Publius was happy at this time, pleased with himself as the practical, proficient man, rewarding himself as he felt he deserved with the reasonable delight of reading books. Sometimes

he did more than read. In one of his letters to Metella he said, 'Read to Pericles these verses about a farmer who much to his sorrow was prevented from getting on with his farm work, and ask him by what famous author they were composed. I'll wager that for once he will be stumped.' Metella, who in any case had the habit of reading to Pericles bits from her parents' letters declaimed —

'Snow and the sharp-toothed wind confine him, happily lazy,
'There with wife and books, old friends and new, by the fireside.
This is the plough he loves, who strangely is reckoned a farmer,
Turning the furrow of thought, reaping the generous harvest.'

'Who is the famous author, Pericles? My father is sure you won't know. Is it Virgil?'

'I should say No, madam. I do not remember any such lines in Virgil. The distinguished author, I think, is Publius Antonius.'

'How clever of you, Pericles! So it is. My father says that, after you had failed to guess, I was to tell you. How could you be so sure? You can't possibly know everything that all our poets have written.'

'No, madam, but I know the Master. It is a little game he likes to play.'

'And you, too! Do you ever write poems yourself, Pericles?'

'Occasionally, madam, just for my private pleasure, though I show them to the Master.'

'Ah,' said Metella, 'you live a life of your own, you two, don't you?'

Before long Publius announced a discovery which was to have strange consequences. The farm lay at the landward base of a promontory which, at its highest, was two hundred feet. On the one side a clear and rapid stream ran down to the sea. On the other was a large bay; the farm overlooked it and there were two or three hundred yards of field and copse sloping down towards the beach. Every day Publius found time to stroll on the sand and among the rocks, always making discoveries that excited him. One day he came on a fresh water spring bubbling up from the beach itself. There were a score of tiny springlets within a foot of space; they were covered by every tide but never silenced, giving a constant flow of the coolest, loveliest water.

Publius was so enchanted that he took personal possession of the spring. Every day, without fail, he carried up a pitcher for his own use in the sun-room. Others, he said, might have the best wine-jars in Italy; he had the best spring, a true gift of the gods.

About the end of March after Sejanus's death, he went down as usual to fill his pitcher. He was wearing old sandals and short tunic, very much at ease. The sun was shining, the air was crisp, little blobs of cloud played in the sky. He felt exhilarated, happy, a little beyond himself. Just then a boat rowed by a dozen slaves came round the cape and passed across the bay before him. It was going northwards from Antium towards Rome. There were four or five girls on board and a few older men and women. As they pointed him out to each other two of the girls waved to him. Publius waved back, then raised his pitcher in salute. They all laughed and shouted to him, and the girls took gay dance steps along the deck, while Publius, his head full of the joy of the morning, the coming spring, his cherished stream and the splash of oars, danced gaily with them, chanting favourite lines from passionate poems and holding the pitcher aloft until the ship disappeared round the far corner of the bay while they were still calling 'Farewell' to each other. 'You would not believe,' he said to Metella, 'how pleasant it all was, how innocent, how like an old Greek scene (though it was water in the pitcher), how like (forgive my vanity) a picture of something when the world was young. I don't know who they were, those neighbours of mine, and, of course, they didn't know me. It was a happy incident, begun, enjoyed and finished in a few moments.' But in that Publius was wrong.

On the evening of the day when Metella received this letter Lucius was no sooner back home than he said with much amusement, 'I wonder what on earth your father has been up to. There's a funny story about him to-day. Several people have been telling me. It seems to have started with some fashionable women who were at the bay near the farm, bathing or fishing or something like that. They say they saw your father, whom they know by sight, celebrating a joyous festival on the beach, with all the accompaniment of Bacchic wine and song and dance. They said he had very little on. They're making a fine story of it, I assure you, and it's growing.'

'I'm sure it is. I must tell father. He'll be amused, especially when he thinks of his pitcher of spring-water being made the symbol of a Bacchic festival.'

Publius was amused but not Caecilia. She said that it was just like Rome, which was a sink, and even if they lived as far away as Britain they would not escape the tooth of scandal. It was a shame that Publius, the most innocent of men, should have to suffer just because he could not remember that a Senator ought not lightheartedly to dance in public, but she thought herself that there was no telling what the busy, malicious, lying tongues of Rome would do now that they had got hold of such a story. She herself did not pretend to know anything about poets, but she believed that one of them said that Rumour, that awful, screeching monster, gathers fresh strength as it goes and they would soon see that it was true.

'Who said it, Pericles? Do you know?' asked Metella when she had read out this sentence in her mother's letter.

'Yes, madam, Virgil, the Aeneid, Book Four.'

'What was it all about, that time, Pericles?'

'Aeneas and Dido, madam. They had just united in love during the thunderstorm specially produced by Juno to bring them together in the cave. Rumour ran wild about them. I am told that it is so even with humbler people, when the same thing happens.'

'Thank you, Pericles, how helpful you are. I don't know how the work of the house would get on without you. Now what does my father himself say?'

Publius said, 'I am not only amused but pleased. Unless I am mistaken, my dear Metella, you will now be able to watch the popular voice, born of excitement or of malice, creating a legend out of my cheerful little story. What! did you not know that I was brandishing a jug of wine, from which I had already drunk too deep? That I was clad in a fawn-skin while in a wild dance I led a rout of frenzied women with ivy or oak leaves in their hair and serpents girdling them? Or that when the women thrust their wands into the earth, fountains of wine and milk burst forth? That the cows which wander from the neighbouring farms down to the beach joined in the dance until the women, in their inspired madness, fell on them and tore them limb from limb? But really, you know, I would not mind being taken for Bacchus,

that great God, for I in my strollings here have seen the dwellings of the Nymphs and the places where Pan sits piping.'

'Euripides!' observed Pericles, delighted. "'The Bacchic women!'" Words spoken by the god himself!

'Pericles!' protested Metella. 'You shock me. Do you mean that my father didn't think of all that for himself?'

'Ah, madam, what does it matter since he has seen the gods with his own eyes? Euripides imagined, but the Master saw, the places where Pan sits piping.'

All the same, as the legend swelled, it did not take so flattering a form to Publius as his always tolerant imagination had suggested. It was undoubted, so ran the story, that he was drinking, that he was drunk, singing-drunk, dancing-drunk, and not alone. Oh, no! by no means alone. Would anyone drink and sing and dance all alone by the sea on a March morning? There were women in it. Women, were there? Yes, quite a number, mostly young, and Publius with a wife and a daughter just married! And they had come to the bay by boat, or rather by several boats, and they hadn't come by chance. It was an orgy, it was all arranged. So that was why he had slipped away from Rome so mysteriously! The old rake! Imitating the Emperor at Capreae, wasn't he! Most people thought he'd run away to escape the suspicion that he had been on the side of Sejanus, that double-dyed traitor. There might have been that motive, too. But there was more in it than that. These women whom he had seduced into the riot on the beach had some men with them. Men, were there, as well as women? That looked bad! That made it look more like Capreae than ever. No, it probably wasn't that kind of debauch at all. It was something worse than that. Political! There was no doubt that all of them, men and women alike, belonged to families which, to say the least, had sympathized with Sejanus at one time or other. Was it a meeting-place? What were they doing? Were the revels genuine at all? Perhaps they were a cloak for a conspiracy? Who knew what might not be happening when scores of boats were busy bringing hundreds of people to the 'festival'. Was it true that it had been reported to the Consuls? Certainly, and to the Emperor also. 'You wait and see — something will come of this.'

What came of it was that an important official waited on

Publius, who gave him an exact account of what had happened. The official, who was an old friend, was amused and sympathetic, but he said frankly that the scandal of Publius's desire to ally his family with the Sejanus party was only sleeping and that Publius should not do anything that would awaken it. Publius said, 'Not even drink from a spring on the beach and dance in the sun?' and the official said, 'Not if there is anyone besides the sun to see you.' It was all very unpleasant, and at the height of the unpleasantness Thyrsus reappeared. In the third week of April, not asking for admission, he walked into the house as though he had never left it. He went straight to the slaves' quarters at the back, where his arrival greatly excited them. They crowded about him, especially the women, welcoming, questioning, admiring. He wore the conical cap which the freedman put on as soon as he was no longer a slave. He had on each arm a bracelet of twisted gold with dragons' heads facing each other. On one hand he wore a ring with a large green stone, on the other a plain gold ring such as was worn only by the Knights and the great men of Rome. Pressing about him the women fingered his ornaments, begging him to say how he had obtained them. He told them eloquently. The bracelets, he said, had been given him by his fellow-passengers only a week or two before when the ship on which he was returning to Italy from Cyprus, where he had left his patron Aulus, had been near disaster, and, the captain being swept overboard, he himself had taken charge and saved them all. The ring with the magnificent stone had been put on his finger by the grateful hand of a princess of Commagene whom, when she was out riding, he had rescued from bandits. The princess had wept, and had even threatened him, when he would not stay with her for ever. But he was proudest, he said, of the gold ring. The Roman Governor of the province of Asia had conferred it on him by the Emperor's order after he had exposed a plot against the Roman State and with his own hand had killed the leader. They listened eagerly as he told them of the riches he had acquired since he left them six months before. With money which Aulus had lent him, he said, and with money which Aulus himself had put into the venture, he had joined a group of merchants of Alexandria who traded to Arabia, India and Ceylon. They sent out glass and ivory, linen and paper; they brought

back spices, rare woods and jewels which they sold to the rich men of Italy and to the princelets and the nobles of the East. He had visited the kingdom of his father, and some day he might return there as its ruler, for he was known as the friend of the Romans, who would reward his merits. The slaves were enchanted that such adventures should have fallen to one who had lately been one of themselves. They were pleased that he should be so gracious to them. They wished that they could accompany him on his dazzling journeys and he suggested that he might buy the freedom of some of the younger ones and take them with him when next he went to the East; he could place them in high positions with his noble friends. He asked them many questions about their doings and the doings of their master and mistress, of Lucius and Metella. He sat like a king in the high chair which they had brought him, with his feet on a stool, bold and impudent, enjoying his fame, smiling at his own power. 'I could buy you all,' he said to them, 'and this house, too, with everybody in it. What is more, before long I will.' Then 'Catch!' he cried, producing a bag from beneath his cloak, tossing out handfuls of coins, watching the scramble with quiet satisfaction. 'Something to remember Thyrsus by — and more to come! Perhaps I'll have a crown on next time instead of this,' waving his cap at them. Suddenly Pericles entered the room. Thyrsus, beaming on the company, plunged into his bag again, and ostentatiously threw him a coin. Pericles caught it cheerfully. Thyrsus shrugged his shoulders. 'You would endure any insult, wouldn't you?' he said. 'Why don't you throw it at me?'

'Not worth while!' said Pericles amiably. 'The mistress wants to see you.'

'She knows I'm here?' asked Thyrsus. 'I was intending to see her when I had finished telling them about my trade in jewels. The girls are quite bitten by it. They want to come with me. I might take some of the good-looking.'

'Jewels?' repeated Pericles. 'Do you trade in jewels? You seem to have plenty.'

They were leaving the room together and entering a passage that was to take them to Metella.

'Do I trade in jewels? In female jewels I do. In slaves! The one trade in which you cannot fail. There's always money in it.'

I'll be the Emperor's right-hand man some day, you'll see. I told those girls that I could place them well with my rich, high-born friends, and so I could, but perhaps not quite in the way they think. Jewels!' he chuckled softly. 'Hallo! who's there? Well, if it isn't little Iris, lovelier than ever. Go along, Pericles. I'll be with you in a moment. I want a word with the little Jewess.' Pericles took no notice, remaining by him. When Iris came up she gave Thyrsus no sign of recognition; she looked straight forward and was about to pass, when he threw his arms out quickly and pinned her lightly between them against the wall on his left.

'Too unkind!' he said, looking at Pericles, who was now just behind his left shoulder. 'Trying to escape from her best friend!' He spoke plaintively. 'Aren't you glad, my sweet, to see your Thyrsus after all these months?'

Iris said nothing but pressed her lips together, frowning, with her eyes now fixed on him; then she moved as though she would push her way through. Thyrsus dropped his hands a little lower on the wall and moved them closer to her sides, so that she had no chance of escape.

'I should leave her alone,' said Pericles.

Thyrsus went on, as though Pericles did not exist, 'I hope you've been faithful to your lover Thyrsus while he's been away?' He shifted his hands and gripped her arms.

'Oh, leave the girl alone,' Pericles was frowning.

'I'm going to your mistress now,' said Thyrsus, 'to buy you for myself — my first female slave.' Holding her arms tightly, he bent his face slowly towards hers.

'I said, leave her alone,' and Pericles, seizing Thyrsus by the left wrist, jerked his arm up, swung him away from the wall, and before he could recover himself walked him forcibly a few steps down the passage. 'You must have your little joke,' he said.

'You know, just for a moment I thought you were serious and I was going to knock you down.' He laughed boisterously, stamped with amusement and clapped Thyrsus on the back. 'I really was,' he said. Iris had disappeared. Thyrsus backed away, his amiability gone, his round face snarling. 'If you lay a finger on me again I'll cut your throat,' he said. 'I won't be touched by a cheap slave like you. Forget again that I'm a freedman, and

I'll make you remember it all your life. Go on, slave, take me to Metella.'

'Yes, sir,' Pericles was imperturbable. 'This way to the mistress.' Entering the room he stood aside and said, 'The freedman Thyrsus, madam, direct from Cyprus and his patron, Aulus Cornelius.'

Metella, who was walking impatiently up and down, stopped and faced Thyrsus. She was more mature, more composed than the young girl who had married Lucius. Indignation gave her authority. She said, 'What do you want here? Why have you come here? How dare you come to this house again?' Then, 'You wait,' she said to Pericles, who, indeed, had already taken a position near the middle of the room and showed no sign of going. To Thyrsus, 'I have a good mind to have you thrown out by the slaves.'

He gave her look for look, but he was cool and complacent.

'I think the Senator Publius Antonius would not approve of that.'

'Leave my father out of it. You stole his money, as he found when you'd gone, and you helped the rogue Parmenio to swindle him.'

'If Publius Antonius desires to go into the question of the household accounts, I would agree, provided that I for my part can go into the question of what he said to Parmenio and what he paid him for.' He shook his head gravely, looking at Metella with infinite insolence. 'I don't think that my late master Publius will want to quarrel with the freedman Thyrsus. We both stand to lose.'

Metella was silent for a moment. He had the whip hand of her. She knew enough of Parmenio's visits to be aware that her father had been extremely foolish. She could not expel Thyrsus by force as she would have liked to do, but she must get rid of him.

'I asked you why you've come here. Is it only to be insolent? If so, enough!'

'I came,' said Thyrsus, 'with a letter to you from my patron Aulus. It is so private that he would trust it to no one but me. I was to deliver it into your own hands — 'to Metella,' he said, 'whom I am going to marry, and you can tell that to whom you like.'

'He wouldn't say that sort of thing to you,' said Metella. 'Give me the letter.' But she felt that Thyrsus had the best of it.

Thyrsus produced a letter from his wallet. When Metella began to read it, he sat down to wait, yawning at times, polishing his gold ring and now and then glancing at the furniture and at Pericles as though they were the same thing. Metella found that it was a curious letter. There was a bit about Cyprus and a bit about Syria—'Syria is only sixty miles or so from the nearest point of Cyprus, where I am. The natives say that on a clear day you can see the Syrian coast from a high point in the island. I haven't seen it, but I've seen a lot of Syrians. They are frivolous, idle, contentious and knavish. (Thyrsus, who bears this letter and who will have managed somehow to read it before it gets to you, is a Syrian, but he is not frivolous, idle or contentious.) Cyprus is dull beyond words, but that is because you are not here with me; in happier days we shall stay here together.' Throughout the letter, ignoring her marriage, except in one sentence, Aulus assumed always that they belonged to each other and that they were separated by his banishment but only for a time. Lucius, Metella thought, would be furious. Then came a passage which at first she did not understand.

'I shall write again soon, but in the meantime I urge you not to be indiscreet. You say—and write—such things that you run great risks. You put yourself and your future in the hands of—I had almost said your enemies, yet I am no enemy but only your devoted admirer and lover, as I shall show when my friend the prince Gaius Caligula comes to power. (But long life to our irreplaceable and already almost divine chief, Tiberius Claudius Nero, whom both men and gods adore!) In particular, I beg of you, never speak or write disloyally of Gaius again. Because, he will soon become Emperor with power of life and death, and how could I bear that you should have said such things about my friend and Emperor? That is, unless you were that to me which reconciled me to your thinking or saying what you like about him. It hurts me to think that the new Emperor himself might learn that you—and your husband?—had once spoken injuriously of him. But I imagine no one else knows, and the secret is always safe with me.'

Metella said to Thyrsus—'You've read this letter?'

‘No.’

‘You haven’t read what your patron Aulus says in it about you?’

Thyrsus smiled. ‘I know the high opinion he has of me, so it is not necessary.’

Metella could not resist another question, watching him sharply. ‘What does he mean about Gaius?’

He shook his head slowly. ‘Does my patron speak of Gaius? I hope he is discreet. I hope he says nothing that could be used to hurt him in the future if it were ever reported to the new Emperor.’

So he knew, thought Metella. Aloud she said, ‘You can go.’

‘And come again, I hope? This has been only a short visit. I had hoped for a longer stay.’

‘And I recommend you, when you leave this house, to take that ring off’ — she pointed to his gold ring, the badge of rank — ‘for if the Aediles of police see you wearing it, you may find yourself in the slaves’ market, sold for a slave again. Such things happen. The Emperor dislikes the fraud.’

Thyrsus looked at her and at Pericles, gazing from one to the other as though he would break out at them violently, but he only said, ‘I will report my welcome to my patron. I think that I shall be here again before long.’ He got up and Pericles accompanied him, neither of them speaking. Some of the slaves were waiting to give him a send-off. When he saw them, he flung off his sullenness, joked with them, and at the finish threw them more coins. As he left he said to Pericles, ‘Only fools would provoke the freedman Thyrsus. I shall come back.’

When, a little later, Lucius read the letter, he said, ‘What does he mean about Gaius? Why does he keep on with his “say or write!” as though he knew exactly what you had said or written. He’s threatening you, of course — threatening what might happen if his friend the future Emperor should know. But it’s absurd. You may have made some of those rash orations of yours’ — his look belied the reproach in the words — ‘but you can’t have written anything. That would be too foolish.’ Metella was knitting her forehead, and she suddenly coloured. ‘Metella!’ he said, protesting, ‘I believe you have.’

‘I’m trying to remember. There was a letter, but it couldn’t possibly be that.’

‘What letter?’

‘The one I wrote to you on the day when Sejanus sent the threatening letter to my father. I was angry, and I sent you a letter saying some nasty things about Gaius — that he was slavish and cowardly because he wouldn’t take action against Sejanus, and there was something about his face, too. You know the sort of thing — I was very angry. But it couldn’t be that because Aulus knew nothing of it.’

‘I never had that letter,’ said Lucius. ‘I could not have forgotten. It never reached me. Whom did you give it to? Iris was bringing me your letters at that time.’

‘Iris was busy and Pericles promised to deliver it. Iris told me.’

‘Better ask Pericles if he remembers. I’m sure I never had it.’

Pericles, reminded of the occasion, explained that he had been summoned by his master and that Thyrsus had offered to take the letter for him. ‘So the fellow kept it,’ said Lucius, ‘and now Aulus has it. Well, we must make the best of it. Don’t worry, sweetheart. If he hadn’t got this letter he would have invented one. If he would use it against you, he’s capable of anything, but against you and me together he can do nothing. We’re not afraid of him.’ He put his arm around her fondly. Two against one, my dear! He stands no chance, eh, Pericles?’

‘You will excuse me, sir. Four against two! You have forgotten myself and Iris, and there is Thyrsus on the other side. Not that I should count him a strong ally to his patron.’

‘He is clever, Pericles.’

‘He is treacherous, sir, and what he has been to a master he may be to a patron. But I would not be in his shoes if Aulus Cornelius turned against him.’

‘In the meantime,’ said Lucius, ‘there are those threats from Aulus and also there is this tiresome scandal about your father, Metella. I think we’d better hold a family council. I’ll get your father and mother to come in from the farm.’

‘A little later Pericles asked for a private word with Lucius. ‘I only wanted to mention this, sir. I stand by all that I said just now, but I ought to add that in my opinion this man Thyrsus may become tiresome.’

‘You really think so, Pericles?’

‘On reflection I feel sure of it, sir.’ He told Lucius of the scene

with Iris which he had witnessed. 'I feel that even now we know little about him, but that what we do know is not promising.'

'I believe you, Pericles.'

CHAPTER II

'I ANNOUNCE,' said Lollia Claudia as soon as she heard about the family conference, 'that I am going to attend this party. I feel that it will need my common sense.' Told by Lucius what was happening, she had called as soon as Publius and Caecilia were back.

'Nice goings on for a yeoman farmer!' she said, greeting them cordially. 'Publius, you're more famous as a farmer than you ever were as a Senator.'

'Farmer!' said Caecilia. 'Do you know that he was going to graft a hundred olive trees this month, and hasn't done a single one? Do you know that when he went out to plough or sow or fell trees he carried writing tablets with him so that he could make notes all the time? I've seen him stop work in a ditch half full of mud and water, take his tablets out and jot down something or other. And I don't believe that he's mended the fences which the goats broke down the other day when they got at the young vines. Or did you, Publius? No, I thought not. A nice farmer your old Cato would think you, I'm sure.'

Publius winked at Lollia. He spoke humbly. 'I try to do everything that Cato orders. If there's one thing he's firm about it is that the farmer should keep his overseer up to scratch. See that he omits nothing, Cato says; see that he does his proper share of work. So I thought it right to leave the grafting and the fences to the overseer.'

'He's quite right, Caecilia,' Lollia put in. 'Mustn't spoil those fellows, or they'll take advantage of you! I know them. But I must say you've been going it, Publius, my dear. Of course it's all silly nonsense about friends of Sejanus meeting you secretly, but you know who put that about, I suppose? Aelia Memmia, of course. She doesn't like you, Publius, and it's just as silly about the women on the beach. It's this private party with Pan and

the nymphs that pleases me — Metella told me you had them all there — and you madly dancing, brandishing a flask of wine, with a fawn-skin wrapped round you.'

'You know,' said Publius, 'actually I was wearing an ordinary tunic — short, I admit, because I was going to work in the fields, and I was carrying a jug of water from my own spring on the beach.'

'I can swallow it all, except the water, Publius. Does anyone here or in the groves of Greece believe that the little god ever yet piped for a man with a jug of water? That asks too much of me. But I would like to ask you something. Were there any Satyrs there?

'Lots,' said Publius, 'and lots!' In every bush. I could see them peeping out, nice little chaps with beards, bushy eyebrows, horns on their foreheads and goatish hooves.'

'The darlings!' said Lollia. 'And the nymphs, Publius, what were they like and what were they wearing?'

Caecilia intervened with decision. 'You know quite well, Lollia, that if there had been a hundred nymphs all round him Publius would have no idea what clothes they were wearing.'

'Not even if they hadn't any?' said Lollia, winking in turn at Publius. 'Of course you're quite right. He's only interested in nymphs in books.'

Pericles, who was present at the discussion, spoke up. 'Those are the most beautiful,' he said.

'There aren't any others, anyhow,' said Metella.

'There are,' Pericles replied, 'but I think that only the Master is likely to ever see them.'

Caecilia inquired severely whether the Master and Pericles proposed to stop talking and come to business. 'It's not their fault,' said Lollia, 'it's mine. I began it, and now we'll stop provided that Publius withdraws that story about the jug of water. Publius?'

'I'll take you to that spring myself, Lollia.'

'And I will carry the wine, Publius. But let's start, or Caecilia will bite the head off the poor Pericles.'

They agreed that whatever was possible must be done to discourage the reports about Publius. They thought that Aulus's hints, together with the insolence of Thyrsus, must be taken

seriously. Metella found that both her parents and Lollia were against her blunt handling of Thyrsus.

'Make no enemies that you can avoid,' said Lollia.

'He's one already,' retorted Metella, 'and a bad one.'

'Then don't make him a worse, my dear.'

'Our position is weak,' said the Senator, 'owing to my indiscretion. I constantly reproach myself. So long as Aulus and his father are banished we are fairly safe, but we must temporize. Before they come back, if they do, things may have taken a good turn for us. But if this scoundrel should turn up again, Lucius' — he spoke to his son-in-law as responsible for his family — 'receive him civilly. I'm sure Metella will do so, and you, Pericles, keep a watch on him. You are too confiding, you know.' He was severe.

'I know, sir. Every morning I tell myself that I must become suspicious. I try hard. I believe I detect signs in myself that I am at last succeeding.'

'Now you two!' said Lollia. 'Listen, everybody. I have a plan. As long as there are any of you in or near Rome the malicious talk will go on. The relatives of Sextus Cornelius will stir up trouble for you — for all of you. I think that Publius and Caecilia should go right away as far as possible. Where is the most distant house you've got?'

'At Comum, on Lake Larius,' said Publius. 'It's half farm, half villa. It belongs to Caecilia. It's been in her family for many years. We could go there.'

'That's the idea,' said Lollia. 'It's over three hundred miles from Rome. Good enough.'

'Only half-way to Britain,' Caecilia sighed. 'I wish we had a villa on the Rhine, Germans or no Germans. I wish the Emperor would conquer Britain so that we could settle there. Still, with the hills and the lakes and the honest people, and three hundred miles between us and the noise of Rome, we should be happy there.'

'Yes,' said Lollia, 'and I'll see that you get all the scandal of the City. You shan't be dull, and you can go on with your ploughing, farmer Publius.'

Publius rubbed his hands. 'No, I've been making other plans. I'm not going to do the farming this time. I am convinced that

to be a good farmer you must either have worked on the land all your life or have studied the subject thoroughly in books. Now, at my age, I can't possibly make up in experience what I've missed, so I must study the books. There are many, I can tell you. There are over fifty books in Greek, mostly in prose but one or two in verse. There is a work by Mago of Carthage, written in the Punic language, in twenty-eight volumes, and there is a Greek author who has translated those and boiled them down, along with much of the fifty books, into twenty volumes. There's even a summary of them in eight volumes, so I shall have a fine choice.'

'However do you know all those things?' said Lucius, full of respect. 'It must have taken you a long time even to find out that those books exist.'

'Well, to be honest, Lucius, it's not me. It's all in Varro's book on agriculture. But I can't for the life of me remember who it was that did the twenty-volume translation and who did the eight-volume summary. Remind me, Pericles?'

But Pericles could not say; with apologies, he did not know.

'Unheard of!' said Metella. 'Such inefficiency! You must get a new librarian, father, at once.'

The embarrassment of Pericles was almost painful. 'All I can remember, sir, is that both their names began with DIO.'

'I've got it.' Publius was jubilant. 'I know now. It's DIONYSIUS and DIOPHANES.'

'Yes!' agreed Pericles happily, as though a heavy burden had been lifted from his mind. 'To be sure, Dionysius of Bithynia and Diophanes of Utica.'

'No! No!' protested Publius, much concerned. 'How clumsy you are to-day, Pericles. Dionysius of Utica and Diophanes of Bithynia — an important distinction. Now we've got it right.'

'Yes, sir. I am sorry. I kept getting glimpses of it but I failed.'

Lollia gave a hoarse chuckle as she whispered to Metella. 'Did you notice Pericles's face? He's a poor liar. He knew all the time, but he wanted to let the Master score off him. He is sly.'

'Of course,' Publius went on, 'I can't give all my time to studying agriculture when we get to Comum. I thought of writing an epic poem in honour of Tiberius, just as Virgil thought of writing one about Augustus. It would be in four parts, one about his

military campaigns, one about his philosophic pursuits when he retired to Rhodes, one about his ideals of Rome's government, the last about his relaxations at Capreae, which I think have been exaggerated. He would, I think, be pleased, and we should all benefit.'

They were protesting with one voice against this terrifying proposal when Pericles, tactfully intervening, said — 'Would you think of learning the Punic language, sir, in order to study Mago in the original? The finer shades of truth often vanish in translation.'

'Not so often, perhaps, Pericles, when the subject is ploughing, scabies and manures. When it is poetry, say the lyric poetry of Greece, the Latin language, though direct, sonorous, lucid —'

'Indeed, and in some poets flexible also, sir, passionate, imaginative —'

'Publius,' said Caecilia, 'how can we decide about those threats from Aulus when you and Pericles conduct an endless literary duet?'

'Not endless, my dear,' replied Publius, 'with you happily there to end it. It is this tempter Pericles. He will not let a subject drop. He leads me astray. You know, Pericles, that although you can say almost anything in Latin there are some things that you can really only say in Greek. Yes, Yes, my dear, to be sure. Well, now, what about this poor, tormented Aulus? How would it be if I went to see him in Cyprus — as a conciliator, I mean?'

No one thought anything of this. They all sat silent.

Then, 'Leave Aulus alone,' recommended Lucius. 'That's my advice. Let him write letters if he likes. The more he writes the more we shall know what he intends. Let him write to Gaius. Gaius won't thank any relative of Sejanus for writing to him, I'll be bound; he might be in hot water himself for less than that. Let's stop here — Metella and I — and go on just as usual.'

Metella agreed with Lucius. Caecilia thought that Metella might go to Comum with them for a time, and Metella said that on no account would she go so far away from Lucius.

Lollia Claudia announced that she had a plan for them also. It would be a good thing for the whole family to leave Rome for a spell; Metella and Lucius had not gone away anywhere when they were married; she had a house at Surrentum, near Naples;

she was going there in a few days; Lucius should get leave and he and Metella should go there for a visit. 'The house is close to the shore. It looks across a broad bay towards Naples on the north; on the right hand it has Vesuvius and from the top of the hill behind Surrentum you look right down on Capreae, just three miles away. The Emperor is at Capreae, so you may have to get permission to look at the island even from three miles off, but at any rate that's the view. My point is, Gaius, too, is at Capreae and I shall try to get him to come over. He's a nice lad. He doesn't say much, he's shy and nervous, but so would anybody be who lived there with the Ogre. I'll get him to visit us, Metella and Lucius will meet him, and if Metella doesn't bewitch him I'm not a Claudian. Then, if master Aulus tries any mischief, he'll be caught in his own trap. Why, Metella would bewitch the Ogre himself, if she could get at him. Isn't it a lovely plan?'

'I don't want Metella to bewitch Gaius,' said Lucius. 'She did that with Aulus, and look what's come of it!'

Metella made a face at her husband. 'We accept, Lollia. When do we start? I shall have to get my best clothes out. You must tell me what Gaius likes to talk about and what sort of clothes he prefers. All right, Lucius dear, I didn't mean it. If he's shy I shall scare him or more probably offend him: I'm certain to be tactless. Is anybody else going to be there, Lollia?'

'I've not asked anyone yet, my dear, but I dare say Valeria will be coming — but not that pest Quintus. Her husband Marcus has a dozen houses, you know, 'up and down Italy, not to speak of others in Gaul, Spain, Greece and Asia. He says a Roman noble should show the provinces that he has a personal interest in their welfare, so he buys estates and builds a mansion in each of them. Not that he goes there himself, of course, but he keeps mobs of slaves. We shall have some officers coming to see us, too. There are a lot about because of Capreae; the place swarms with guards. They'll all be falling in love with Metella, Lucius, but you needn't worry; they'll be fighting each other about her. It's agreed, then? Come in ten days, say at the end of the first week in May. That'll give me time to get everything ready. I'll meet you at Pompeii. Will that suit you, Caecilia? When shall you go to Comum?'

'I expect when Publius says he has got all those books together. Ten days should do, Publius?'

'Some of the books can go off at once, my dear; others I must go with personally. I shall have to recover some that I've lent — very difficult! I've remembered something else that I must do. I must read Livy right through. It's a lot, you know, a hundred and forty-two books, but it's the only way, I'm sure, to get the spirit, the essence, of the work. Read in big chunks, too. What's your opinion, Pericles?'

'Pericles,' said Caecilia firmly, 'has no opinion.' He's coming with me and Metella now to discuss what has to be done about this house and the slaves while we are at Comum and they are at Surrentum. I suppose you want Pericles to go with them, Publius? Iris, of course, will go with Metella.'

'Yes, Pericles must go with them. They need him, and, besides, he might run into the Emperor. That would be a stroke of luck for the Emperor. I don't suppose he's ever met anyone quite like Pericles.'

CHAPTER III

A WEEK later, Publius and Caecilia were on their way to Comum, Caecilia protesting that she hoped this time never to return to Rome. When they crossed the Apennines north of Luna, Publius, being much disturbed on hearing that a band of escaped slaves, all desperate men, were plundering the countryside, rode for a whole day fully armed beside the baggage mules that carried his books. An escort of soldiers had been provided by the authorities for the distinguished traveller, but a short conversation with its members about the books and their authors convinced him that they would be imperfect guardians of treasures to which they were, and were apparently disposed to remain, indifferent. He noticed with pleasure that they did not fear the expected desperadoes but with sorrow that in their rude way they talked of nothing but the local Games and beast hunts. Riding forward to Caecilia's carriage he complained about this.

'And what,' she asked, 'did you expect? They are peasants,

mechanics, corner-boys, riff-raff. Did you think they would chatter about Sophocles and Terence?’

‘And why not, may I ask?’ said Publius hotly. ‘I don’t see why they shouldn’t. And about Homer and Ennius and all the others, too! Ought they not to know their own countrymen? Ought they not to know the Greeks to whom every Roman owes so much? If Hesiod and Virgil could write about agriculture in noble verses, can you tell me why the Roman peasant should not shout those verses aloud while he goes about his ploughing? Then Rome would be strong, happy and prosperous. But otherwise, Caecilia, it is going to be bad for Rome. Do you see what is happening? We have conquered the world and now we have to hold what we have got. But already the barbarian is beginning to press on us from the north, and how are we going to hold on unless we train the minds of our whole people? Yes, I know we use all these subtle, clever Greeks and Jews and Asiatics and Africans, but that won’t save us from the barbarians unless we teach and train the Latin people — all of them — much better than we do now. And that’s what I would do. I would have everyone of them — yes, I would, reading and talking and quarrelling over Aristophanes and Lucilius, Sappho and Livy. I say that if they were the men to do it — and the women with them — this would bring many good things besides. They would be so intelligent, lively and judicious that the barbarian would always be defeated, he would be tamed, he would be absorbed, and Rome would stand secure for another thousand years. But our mere brawn against barbarian brawn, our limbs against their limbs, our few against their multitudes! — why, you can hear the muttering and tramping even now from far across the Alps — if that is all we can do to meet them, some day we shall be lost.’ Then he bent towards Caecilia, and said sternly — ‘And those who won’t learn shall have no doles in money, food or games. Now I’ll tell you exactly how I would train them.’ Caecilia was not, however, to hear how Publius proposed to regenerate the State, for at that moment a loud uproar broke out behind him and shouting, ‘Robbers! The Robbers!’, he dashed back to defend his books. He found that it was only two of the escort who, having differed over the merits of their favourite gladiators, had agreed to settle this delicate question by bruising each other’s faces.

They came from the neighbouring towns of Placentia and Cremona, between whose gladiators and their passionate supporters there was stern rivalry. One of the soldiers having chanced to say that Priscus of Placentia was the best gladiator in northern Italy, the other contended that Favonius of Cremona was better, having killed twenty-seven opponents, which was one more, he said, than Priscus. The first upheld that Priscus had killed twenty-eight and that in any event most of Favonius's victims were only prisoners who were driven half-armed into the arena in order to be butchered. His opponent retorted that Priscus was known throughout Italy for foul tactics and that, when he fought in a troop against a troop, he notoriously saved his own skin at the expense of his colleagues. Placentia's son remarked that the Cremona school of gladiators stank in the public nostrils for trickery, cowardice and corruption. Even in Cremona itself they admitted so much when they were sober. The man from Cremona, remarking that no trickery was needed to dispose of anyone from Placentia, knocked the Placentian down. At the moment when Publius arrived the other soldiers, stirred by the same sense of justice as the principals, were about to join in the fray on one side or the other. At the sight of Publius they refrained, the fight stopped, the controversy was deferred. Publius told them that he would have to report their indiscipline. He did not, however, do so, reflecting that it was idle to deal with symptoms so long as nothing was done to reach the seat of the disease, illiteracy, which was poisoning the body politic. He did not, however, when they left him, give them the customary gratuity, whereupon, Senator and Antonius though he was, they hooted him. 'You see, Caecilia,' he said, 'how intemperate are the ignorant,' and he rode on, throwing the reins on the neck of his horse, a skinny and depressed animal, and intently reading the *Iliad*, sometimes declaiming a passage, sometimes illustrating what he read with sudden, sweeping gestures, so that the horse would fling up his head and shy, thereby, as it seemed to Publius, displaying himself as one of the high-stepping steeds that stormed magnificently, like a winter torrent, over the plains of Troy.

At about the same time Lucius and Metella were on their way to Surrentum, Metella with Iris in a carriage, Lucius riding with Pericles and two other slaves, who were to act as messengers to

Rome and Comum. On the third day they reached the heights on the northern shore of the Bay of Naples and, looking across it, saw the Surrentum peninsula forming the southern side, and, merging with it, a tiny spot on the sea, the island of Capreae. On the next day the road ran along the coast with Vesuvius rising on the left. They had stopped to eat by the roadside. Metella, looking up at the mountain, said with a pretended shiver, 'It's too close; I wouldn't like to live near a horrible volcano.'

'Oh,' said Lucius, 'there's no danger. The children play on it. The thing is out. Isn't that so, Pericles?'

'Yes, sir. The learned say so. Actually, one of them has just written a poem about volcanoes. It has not been published yet, but the Master is one of the very few in Rome who have been allowed to see it privately, and he showed it to me. No one outside Rome knows anything about it; the poet only showed it to the Master as a great privilege; he himself said so to the Master. The poet says that Vesuvius is dead. That is why he had to take Aetna in Sicily as the subject of his poem. Aetna still threatens, Vesuvius is dead.'

'I'm glad,' said Metella, looking round her at the sea and the fields and then at the cone of Vesuvius which frowned over them. 'I'm glad there is no danger to this happy, happy land. Now let's get on to Pompeii.'

Lollia met them, as arranged, at Pompeii, which was near the end of the bay, not far from the point where they turned right for Surrentum. She greeted them gaily. 'You can come here for a change when you tire of Surrentum,' she said. 'It's a fine, fashionable place just now and growing all the time. It's the same right round the bay, you know. Naples is full and so is Herculaneum. So are even the villages; you can't get a bed anywhere. It's all because the Emperor is at Capreae. He may shut himself up on the island, but there are a lot of people living there and a great many more coming and going. He's looking after the provinces just as strictly as he ever did in Rome. Every day there are officials and officers and foreign deputations coming down to the coast and waiting till they are allowed to go over to the island. I can tell you that some of them go there laughing and come back very serious. There are a few who come back

prisoners and a few who must come back in the night if they come back at all, for no one sees them again. There are others who come to see what they can get, both men and women, Romans, Italians and foreigners, and many of them live in Pompeii or round about so that they may make sure of missing nothing, for where the Emperor is with his chief friends and Gaius with his friends, there are certain to be rewards to be given, appointments to be had and profits to be made, and if a man or his wife cannot get at the Emperor himself, perhaps they can get at his favourite adviser or the freedman who deals with his letters or his petty cash, or the slaves who anoint him or shave him; or if they can't get at the Emperor's slaves, perhaps they can curry favour with Gaius or his sister Drusilla just in case something should happen to the Emperor and Gaius came to power. That's why Pompeii's crowded just at present. When Sejanus was alive, most of these people stopped in Rome because that, they thought, was where the honours and rewards were to be had, though there were others, far more than Sejanus ever knew, who spent their time down here, waiting to drop into the Emperor's ear their profitable poison, but now half Rome is on the watch, or on the hunt, between Naples and Surrentum. You drive along the bay any morning or early evening and you'll meet as much of fashionable Rome as you've ever seen in the City itself.'

On the next day they arrived at the villa at Surrentum. 'I'll give you two or three days to be lazy in and about the house,' said Lollia, 'and then we're going to start on the siege of Capreae. The young master Gaius is there all right, I've found that out. I was afraid he might be away, though; if he were, it wouldn't be for long. Some of them round here call him "the prisoner". The Emperor they call "He". They nod towards the island and they say "Is it true he's ill?" or "What's 'he' up to now? ". Gaius was allowed to make a trip last week along the Campanian coast, but he's back now. His sister Drusilla is with him. He depends a lot on her. No one knows how he would endure it all if she were not with him. I'm going to get them both to come over here to dine with us and then perhaps you will be able to go there. I'll slip over and see them myself. It will be better than leaving it to a letter!'

The house stood on a broad, flat ledge below the hills of the

peninsula as they fell away to the sea. It faced northwards. They could watch the ships along the bay go in and out of Naples and Puteoli. It was a long house with many rooms. At one end a dining-room and a lounge side by side but with a space between them, stood out from the main line of buildings; they had windows in the side-walls as well as in the front, so that they were full of light and had views of the sea on each of the three sides. In a line with them there were a covered colonnade and a terrace overlooking the sea. At the farthest point was a tower with three storeys, the highest being a sun-room with a prospect on all sides. Below the house was a little quay at which Lollia and her friends boarded the boats for their sea excursions.

But Lollia did not find it so easy to get over to the island. She went, first, as was necessary, to seek a permit from the official in charge of embarkation at Surrentum. No one could go to the island without a formal permit and no one could get a permit until application had been made to the secretariat on the island and sanction given by it. The official regretted to have to inform Lollia that landing on the island was at present forbidden. Orders had just come that only the arrival of persons on important State business or of guests of the Emperor might even be notified. Police boats were to be seen patrolling the waters round the island. Similar orders had been given at all the places on the bay from which visitors set out for Capreae. Lollia could not learn the reason for the prohibition, which had come abruptly. The same thing had happened before and now, as on other occasions, there was a fine crop of rumours. The Emperor was ill; he was very ill; learned physicians had been taken over to him secretly during the night; he was dying; the Consuls had been sent for; he was as good as dead. Or, a plot against him had been discovered; the fleet at Misenum was under orders to sail up the coast towards the capital; the Emperor was coming to the mainland at any moment; he had summoned the legions; he was going to Rome. Or, an infectious fever had broken out at Naples; it had been detected at Herculaneum; it was suspected at Pompeii; it might spread to Capreae. Or, perhaps the reason was only that the Emperor rebelled against the sight of those who intruded on a seclusion that he always sought and never found. The prohibition lasted for ten days, during which Lucius

and Metella, sometimes with their hostess, bathed and rowed and fished or, climbing the hill behind the house, sat and looked down at Capreae across the straits, watching the infrequent boats that went to and fro with the privileged passengers, wondering what plans were being formed, what orders were being sent out from that tiny island by the solitary master of the Roman world, and what manner of man would be the young Gaius who was now being so strangely shaped to succeed to more than human power.

On the day after the prohibition was removed Lollia sent word to Gaius that she was at Surrentum and would like to go over to the island in order to tell him about some guests whom she wanted him to meet. On the same day, it being fine, she proposed to Lucius and Metella that they should go in her yacht for a sail round the island. As they went along the south side they saw figures standing at frequent intervals on the shore and it was the same even on the cliffs which on the eastern side rose sheer out of the water to a height of several hundred feet. Once, when they were close inshore and saw the figure of a tall stiffly-standing man, with a group of others behind him, motionless at the cliff edge, and looking down on them, Metella asked whether this might not be the Emperor himself. Lollia looked hard and said that it was only one of the many guards who watched all round the island lest anyone unauthorized should land. But she added that they were rather close to shore and that if they could see the guards so well they had better get further out lest they should be accused of undue curiosity. So, since there was scarcely any wind, they set the slaves to work (except Pericles) with the oars, and returned along the northern side, on which was the principal landing-place. Some little time after they had passed this a boat shot out from the jetty and came after them. It was a gaily painted craft with one bank of oars, six slaves rowing on each side, and a deck above. The prow curved upwards and outwards like a beak, while at the stern was a raised platform with a high bulwark round it. The boat was in fact a small model of a pirate craft. On the deck, beside the slave who was in charge of the boat, was a young Roman very like that one whom Caecilia in her dream had thought she saw killing Sejanus. He was tall and he had a big body, but his legs and neck were thin. His face was big and white, his eyes rather sunken, and, when his attention

was not diverted to what was going on around him, anxious. At this moment he was lively, almost boisterous, shouting to Lollia as he overtook her boat. 'Why, it's Gaius,' she said, springing to the side. Orders were being shouted to the rowers in Gaius's boat, which was coming on fast. As it approached Gaius was seen preparing to jump down on to the yacht. The slaves rowing in the yacht, receiving no special orders and misjudging the speed of the other's approach, did not ship their oars in time. The bigger boat crashed into the yacht's oars, the yacht heeled over, Gaius as he leapt got one foot only on its deck and was about to fall back into the sea when Pericles, suddenly shooting out his hand, seized his shoulder, pulled him forward and landed him fairly on his feet on the deck. At that moment the two boats clashed heavily together. As the others, who had been motionless with fright, came running forward, Pericles went down on his knee before Gaius, for a second looked him full in the face and then bent his head respectfully. 'Get up, slave,' said Gaius, 'you saved me from a ducking. Is he yours, Lollia?'

'No, he belongs to my friends here! He's modest, but a treasure. He's really a poet, and that's why I want him myself.'

'A practical poet, happily for me!' Gaius laughed pleasantly, the uneasiness went out of his face, he was gay and for the moment looked little more than his twenty years. Pericles drew back and the rest of them went to sit down together in the stern.

'This is luck,' said Lollia. 'I thought we should never get on to the island. You've been shut up for nearly a fortnight, Gaius. What on earth's it all about?'

Gaius shrugged his shoulders. 'Orders! These things happen. One thing or another. It might have been a year.' His uneasy look returned.

Lollia explained. 'The reason why I was coming to see you was that we want you to come over to a party. And, of course, Drusilla.'

'Who will be there?' Gaius did not say it ungraciously; it sounded like a question that he knew he had always to ask.

'Nine in all. Metella and I, who represent youth and beauty; Lucius Paetus, the strong and silent Roman —'

'Strong and silent!' protested Metella. 'Why, I can't stop his talking and I can twist him round my little finger.'

'Yes,' said Lucius, 'That's why she defied her father and Sejanus to marry me.'

'Sejanus?' asked Gaius, looking puzzled. 'Oh, yes, I remember now. I heard something at the time. Wasn't Aulus Cornelius concerned? He was banished, if I remember rightly.'

Lollia intervened hurriedly. 'And then there'll be Drusilla, the devoted sister.'

'And me,' added Gaius, 'the grateful brother.'

'That makes five, and — six! — the wife of Marcus Calpurnius, Valeria, who is a model of maternal love, like Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi.'

'Never heard of them!' said Gaius.

'Oh, Gaius, haven't you? At school, I mean? The revolutionary brothers, two hundred years ago. There were riots and executions. It was Cornelia who said she had children but no jewels.'

'To-day she would have jewels but no children. We've made progress, too. We have the executions now without the riots.' Gaius laughed noisily, embarrassed at his own temerity.

'And, seventh, Titus Aemilius, the poet.'

Gaius groaned. 'I know you, Lollia; you're laying a trap for me. You're going to get me there and then he's going to recite his frightful poems. Can't you stop him?'

'No one has ever stopped him, Gaius. Besides, he's so anxious to recite before you. He thinks that you will make him famous when you have heard him. He's so excited that he doesn't know what to do.'

Gaius made a grimace. 'He could burn his poems.'

'And then there's number eight, Cassius Chaerea, the commander of the guards on the mainland. You know him, Gaius. He belongs to the Praetorians and he's a great disciplinarian.'

'Put him next to Titus then, and I'll tell him that he'll be summarily dismissed if he let's Titus recite a single line.'

'I can't put him next to Titus. Titus insists on being at the end of the couch so that he can get down and recite more poetically. But I'll put Cassius right opposite so that he can fix Titus with the military eye.'

'Who's your ninth, Lollia?' asked Metella.

'I hope Gaius is going to provide him. Gaius, my dear boy,

I want you to get Thrasyllus to come with you and Drusilla. Everyone talks about him and no one sees him. I suppose he really exists, Gaius? If he came to Rome sometimes and people knew that he was really with the Emperor they wouldn't say the things they do about what goes on there,' and she pointed at the island.

'What do they say?' Gaius frowned, but he did not wait for an answer. 'I'll ask him. He means a great deal to the Emperor, you know. He always has done ever since they were at Rhodes together. They spend a lot of time discussing how to make sure that Rome will always be well governed. A gloomy business. I dare say he'll be glad to get away.'

'Will he talk philosophy to us?' asked Metella. 'I shall be afraid of him.'

'Not he,' said Lollia, 'he gets enough of that on the island, I'll be bound. He'll talk scandal. I know these learned men, but they call it studying human nature; they collect experience, they say, to aid their theorizing. Can you come, Gaius? Arrange it with Drusilla and let me know. It'll be a very frugal meal. Chopped leeks and tunny fish, that sort of thing, just right for a philosopher.'

Gaius laughed. 'Who told you that philosophers don't like good food and drink? Don't they identify the good and the beautiful? I've seen them at it, and, what's more, they're right. Don't try your plebeian meals on me, anyway. Oysters from Britain, if you can get them, that's the thing for me!'

'Well, don't leave it too long or these two will be gone.'

'I must certainly come before you go.' Gaius addressed himself to Metella. 'Perhaps next week, then.' He and Lollia discussed some details, then Gaius, taking his leave, departed to his boat. It came alongside and he stood for a moment uncertain whether he could leap up to the deck. Pericles came up, went down on hands and knees and made a back. Gaius stepping on him, jumped on to the deck above, but the jump was high and as he thrust off violently he pushed Pericles right over.

'Sorry, poet,' he said, laughing, as he looked back. He waved gaily to Lollia and the others. Then they saw that in a moment he was again serious and preoccupied.

As they watched the boat making for the island, 'What does our future Emperor remind you of?' asked Lollia. 'I should say

Patience — to give no opening to his enemies, to suffer everything and wait. What do you think, Lucius?"

'I should say Doubt, about himself and everybody else.'

'I should say Fear,' said Metella.

'And what,' asked Lollia, 'does the wise Pericles think?'

'I am not wise enough to say, Madam, except that this poor, anxious youth, who has never been free, will suddenly be let loose with the power almost of a god, and who knows what will come of it?'

A week later Lollia held her party. Gaius, Drusilla and Thrasyllus had all promised to come. Titus arrived early. When Lollia came into the lounge next to the dining-room that looked on the sea he was already sitting there with Lucius and Metella. Lollia was dressed in a long flowery robe of almost transparent silk, her hair elaborately dressed, her face skilfully made up. Something had amused her, and, simply saying, 'You're early, Titus,' she went on in high glee — 'Really, Metella, this Pericles of yours is beyond price. I met him just now when I came out of my room. I assure you that I did not even ask him what his friend Horace or any other poet would say about me in this dress. I did not say a word. I only stopped and looked at him — you know what I mean — and he responded at once. He said in the most respectful way that I did not need a Coan robe in order to show off my beauty — well, I know it's rather thin but I can't afford at my age to be dowdy — and "thou hast no means to improve upon thy form", said he. So I just told him to carry on, and then he shook his head reproachfully and said — yes, he did, Lucius — "Love, naked himself, does not love one who makes an art of Beauty." You wouldn't believe that anyone could say such bold things and at the same time be so respectful. You never know where you are with these demure men. Oh, Titus, how tiresome you are!'

The aspiring poet was a young man in the early twenties, short and thick-set, with a bull-neck, broad nose and heavy chin. He should have been a pugilist or wrestler; he prided himself that he was every inch a poet. While Lollia was talking he had slowly risen and was regarding her with much solemnity. He had said nothing at all when she rebuked him. Metella looked distressed. Lucius was smiling grimly.

'Lollia Claudia,' said Titus, standing rigid and smiling foolishly, 'I am going to write you a long letter soon.' He repeated more gravely, 'A long letter. I have been intending for a long time to write you a long letter.' Pleased with the sound of the words, he said, 'a very long letter for a very long time', looked puzzled and corrected himself— 'a very long time for a very long letter', then nodded approvingly. 'You will be surprised, Lollia. I have been thinking for a very long time.' Then he stretched out his hand towards some glasses of wine on a little table. Lollia stepped forward quickly. 'No, you don't! No more now, Titus! If you go on this way there'll be no reciting for you to-night and then you'll be sorry that you've been so silly.' Titus moved round her, walking cautiously and looking as though he were carrying out a cunning manoeuvre to get to the wine glasses. 'Take the table away, Lucius,' said Lollia. 'He mustn't have any more or there'll be a scene. He's a fool when he's like this.' Titus stopped, looked at her with disapproval, raised a warning finger, glanced at Lucius and Metella to attract their attention, fixed his reproachful gaze again on Lollia and said—

'They ask me why I do not sleep.

Lollia, 'tis thou.

They ask me why I often weep.

Lollia, 'tis thou.'

Lollia in turn shook a finger in his face, saying—

'They ask which tippler comes to dine.

Titus, 'tis thou.

They ask what poet swills the wine.

Titus, 'tis thou.'

'Now,' she said, 'you'll come away and have a rest or there'll be no dinner for you to-day. Pericles will look after you. Yes, I mean it. It's for your own good.' She led him, protesting, away. When she came back she was seriously disturbed. 'It's his horrible poetry,' she said. 'He's worked himself up over the chance of reciting to Gaius, who will be bored and probably rude, and already he's drunk far too much. Soon there'll be no holding him. I can't send him away because he wouldn't go; he's always obstinate and if he's crossed when he's drunk he becomes quarrel-

some. I only hope he'll sleep it off and not wake at all until the party's over.'

A little later the three from the island arrived. Drusilla was a dark beauty of fifteen years, composed and thoughtful. Gaius was gay, almost boisterous; he seemed to have thrown away his cares. He was like this, they said, when he was with Drusilla. She watched him carefully and it was noticed that, if for a moment he relapsed into silence and brooding, she spoke to him and touched his hand and smiled at him, and he forgot his worries. Thrasyllus gave those who did not know him a surprise. He was a little, tough, straight man, with a short, straggly beard, slightly Semitic features, twinkling eyes.

'If he's a philosopher,' whispered Lucius to Metella, 'he's the laughing sort, but that would never go down with Tiberius.'

'He's on holiday from Tiberius,' Metella replied. 'So are Gaius and Drusilla — isn't she lovely? — that's why they're all so gay. Listen to them.'

'I like your frock, Lollia.' It was Drusilla speaking. 'There's nothing as smart as that down here.'

'I can tell you,' said Gaius, 'it will shock the provincials if they see you in it — which, by the way, isn't difficult, Lollia. You had better not let the Emperor know about it, he's so severe in these days.'

'Are you telling me it's indecent, Gaius? What do you say, my dear philosopher?'

'My dear hostess,' replied Thrasyllus, 'a single garment stretching from the neck to the heel may be infinitely more decent than a larger number less evenly distributed. And woman, I believe, has long ago discovered that the half-veiled is more alluring than the naked truth because hope excites while satisfaction cloyes.'

Lollia nodded at him gaily. 'What beautiful words you use! I wish I lived on your island; you and I must get to know each other well. Ah, here's Cassius and Valeria, too.' Cassius Chaerea was a prim little man, gentle in voice, quiet in manner, cold in mind and entirely pitiless.

Thrasyllus looked round the gathering. 'I understood I was to meet a poet. We have few of them on our stern island. Where is he, Lollia?'

'Rehearsing, I expect,' said Drusilla. 'Till the last moment.'

Gaius gave a broad grin. 'Drinking, if I know him. Till the last moment.'

Lollia told them what had happened. 'He's very unfortunate. When he's composing — filled with the god, he calls it — he won't eat anything, he calls it gross, but he won't stop drinking. He says it's necessary for inspiration, but it seems to me it only makes him silly. Now let's go in to dinner.'

In the dining-room three couches were set out, each for three persons. Gaius was in the place of honour. Lollia, as hostess, should have been next below him, but it was known that he always wished that Drusilla should be there, so Lollia was in the middle, Titus's vacant place being to the right. With Gaius on the middle couch were Metella and Thrasyllus. Then, on the couch above, were Lucius, Valeria and Cassius.

	Gaius	Metella	Thrasyllus	
Drusilla				Lucius
Lollia				Valeria
Titus				Cassius

A table of maple wood stood in the open space. The slaves brought in and later removed trays containing the dishes for each course, and between the courses poured water over the diners' hands. The meal was not quite as simple as Lollia had promised. She knew in any case that Gaius had spoken truly when he said he liked good foods. There was a profusion of light preliminaries — sardines, salads, eggs, olives, shell-fish, little sausages, kidneys, fragments of birds, pieces of ham, damsons and pomegranate seeds. Then came something more substantial — mullet, boar's head, sow's paunch and venison, chicken and duck and goose, mushrooms, oysters and hare. Fruits of all kinds made the third part of the meal. The choicest wines, Caecuban, Falernian, Chian, were there. Thrasyllus assured Lollia that never in his long philosophic experience had he met such an exquisite choice of wines; he had not until that moment realized how necessary to him it was that her desire to live on the island should be fulfilled. When, at the end of the first course, the slaves were pouring water on their hands, 'I say', exclaimed

Gaius, 'do you know what the Emperor heard from Rome the other day? Some vulgar freedman there has been having his guests' hands washed with wine at dinner. The Emperor was furious.'

'Yes, at the waste,' said Thrasyllus, 'but he didn't do anything all the same. You can't stop that sort of thing if you let those fellows get the money.'

'Why not,' asked Gaius, 'if you have the power? I know how I would stop it. Take their money first if they go on. If they deceive you, sell them for slaves. Burn them. You can do anything if you have the power.' He had raised his voice in excitement; then, as if alarmed by his vehemence, he looked round self-consciously, and fell silent.

'Yes,' said Drusilla, 'but you know, Gaius, you wouldn't do anything of the kind if you really had the power; you are much too kind-hearted.'

Lollia joined in the talk about the extravagances of freedmen, and Lucius, leaning over to Thrasyllus, asked questions about the Emperor. Thrasyllus said he was as industrious as ever in affairs of State. He tired out his staff. He started early in the mornings and kept them up to all hours: he was always sending to the secretariats at Rome for officials to come to him with information; he watched the administration of the provinces as sharply as Augustus himself. 'You know,' he said, 'he's keeping Governors in their provinces for years together in order that they may know the people and their problems thoroughly. The Governors may not like it, but it's good for the provinces. There's Poppaeus Sabinus who's been twenty years in Moesia, Lucius Apronius was sent to Lower Germany five years ago and is still there, and Pontius Pilate has been six years already in Palestine. He's having his troubles, by the way, with those obstinate Jews, but he knows his job, he has a firm hand, too firm sometimes, and the Emperor keeps him there. You are in the eastern secretariat yourself, aren't you, Lucius Paetus?' Lucius said he was concerned with Syria. 'Have you ever thought of getting out there yourself?' asked Thrasyllus. 'I should think it would be worth while. If you get on the staff of a Consul or some high official going out east it would make advancement much more rapid for you when you got back to Rome.' Lucius said he was sure of this but that he had little influence. 'Publius Antonius

has influence enough,' said Thrasyllus, 'and I might myself be able to help.'

Thrasyllus dropped his voice and began to talk about the Emperor. Gaius, Lollia and Metella were now discussing whether the invasion of Britain was coming off at last, while Valeria was reciting the virtues of little Quintus to Cassius, who, finding that he was only required at intervals to indicate a mechanical assent, was able to devote close attention to his food.

'I've heard about you and your wife from Lollia,' said Thrasyllus, 'and you have my sympathy. I don't think you've anything to fear now from that Sejanus business, but keep out of the lime-light. The Emperor' — he leaned over towards Lucius — 'is a sick man, but not physically. He's tormented by the past. You've heard, I suppose, about the message that he sent to the Senate the other day? He showed it to no one before it went. I'm told the Senate were terrified when it was read out. They didn't know what they should or could say to him, without doing wrong.' Thrasyllus was only whispering now but every word came clear to Lucius. 'He said to the Senate, "What to write to you, or how to write, or what not to write at this time, may heaven bring me to a worse death than I feel myself dying daily if I know"'. He walks for hours on the cliffs, sometimes without speaking a word even to me, though he likes to have me with him. He broods over those whom he has lost — his young wife Vipsania, whom he loved and whom Augustus made him abandon in order to marry his daughter, the whore Julia, and his son Drusus, whom Livilla and Sejanus poisoned, and Agrippina and her son Nero, who he believed plotted against him. The dead are with him and he cannot endure the living. He says he must go back to Rome, he tries to go, and he hates the people so that he cannot enter the City. Yet he never ceases to labour for them. He is a slave to duty, consumed by his passion for honest government. The young man' — he made the slightest possible gesture towards Gaius — 'will do well when his time comes. You need not fear him. He is oppressed, as well he might be by what has happened all around him, but he is good at heart and sound in mind; he will do well when this gloom passes away. But mind you, gloom or not, Rome has a good Emperor, a better Emperor, I sometimes think, than Rome deserves.'

Valeria raised her voice so as to make herself heard. 'I do hope,' she said, 'that nobody is going to invade Britain for another ten years at least.' Although she had not yet exhausted the subject of Quintus's military promise she had become aware that some of the company were predicting an early campaign against Britain. At first the others did not hear her. Cassius spoke.

'Hi! You over there! Valeria says there must be no war against Britain for another ten years.'

'Why?' asked Lollia. 'Will your husband be too old for service by that time, Valeria?'

'No, but he and I think that Quintus will be just old enough.'

'You look ahead!' said Gaius. 'How old is this young warrior?'

'Getting on for eight,' replied Valeria.

'And one so young already exhibits the military mind?' smoothly inquired Thrasyllus.

'My husband Marcus says that he's never known anyone show such early promise. What impresses him is the speed with which Quintus acts when he's playing with his toy soldiers. He has thousands of them, legionaries, Gallic cavalry, Parthian archers, Illyrian slingers, catapulters, stone-throwers, arrow-throwers, battering rams, turrets — everything. My husband says that the quickness with which Quintus seizes the situation — that's what he calls it — and moves his men to meet it is uncanny. He says it almost frightens him and certainly amounts to genius. He says it reminds him a little of Julius Caesar. He says that as a captain Julius Caesar exceeded everyone in speed.'

'Ah, yes, indeed,' said Thrasyllus, 'that's why they called him the "portent"'. His speed paralysed them.'

'That's just what Marcus says. I'm so glad you agree. Only he says that Quintus in some ways improves on Julius Caesar. Quintus never pardons his prisoners. He executes them all. Sometimes he takes a whole army prisoner by sheer skill, but it makes no difference; he spares no one. Marcus thinks it shows great intelligence for a child not yet eight. And no one helps him, you know; he does it all himself. So you see, if the war against Britain did not come for about ten years, Quintus would be just ready for it. Marcus thinks that he would be appointed to command a legion almost at once, if promotion went by

quality and not by influence. Marcus says the amount of favouritism in the army nowadays is disgraceful. Birth counts more than merit and flattery than service. Marcus is sure that it is undermining the State. Still, Marcus himself belongs to the Calpurnian house and I come from the Julian, so it will be a scandal if Quintus is not given a good post. I only hope my uncle remains in command in Upper Germany.'

The main dishes were finished, slaves were pouring water over the diners' hands, others were bringing in fruit and sweetmeats. An offering was made to the household gods. Pericles entered with some haste, went straight to Lollia and whispered to her. The guests heard scattered phrases — 'awake', 'I did my best', 'insisted', 'practising now', 'wine'. Lollia, looking perturbed, asked Gaius to excuse her if for a few moments she left the table as Titus was awake but not at all well and she must see him. Gaius, much amused, was assenting when the slaves were to be seen hurriedly making way for a newcomer, Titus himself, who advanced slowly through the room and took his place on the couch by Lollia. He was dignified as before, not so much solemn as determined, and slightly triumphant like one who had attained an end. He did not speak.

'I knew,' said Lollia, 'that you would not mind our beginning without you.'

'Why, we've almost finished,' Valeria whispered to Cassius, who took no notice.

Titus drank a glass of wine and nodded to a slave that he should refill it. 'I have to thank you, Lollia Claudia, for this excellent dinner —'

Valeria giggled. 'Why, he hasn't had any dinner,' Cassius frowned at her, Titus rebuked her with an indignant, magisterial look. 'I was saying,' he said, now looking round the company and speaking more slowly, 'that I desire to thank Lollia Claudia for this excellent dinner. I have written a poem on the City of Troy which I am going to recite. I have it here' — he produced a large roll, the equivalent of a book — 'but I do not need this help; I know my poems by heart, for my heart is in my poems.' He placed the roll on the couch and, as he did so, he met a furious warning glance from Lollia. He smiled at her, shaking his head, and then stopped quite still for a few seconds as though trying

to recall something that had escaped him. 'I was going to write you a long letter, Lollia. I am certainly going to write it some time. It will be a very long one, Lollia. It will surprise you. You have never known my feelings about you. Now I must recite my poem.' He was rising from the couch when Lollia took him by the wrist and pulled him down again. 'Presently, Titus,' she said aloud, gaily. 'Be patient, your turn is coming. At the end.' She leaned towards him, giving his shoulder a little pat and as she did so whispered in his ear, 'Don't drink any more. Stop drinking. Don't make a fool of yourself with Gaius here.'

'I know that my friend Gaius,' said Titus, making a grave inclination towards him, 'and', with another respectful gesture, 'the lovely Drusilla desire me to recite my poem on the City of Troy at once. The poet speaks because he must and when he must. He speaks where he must. He is inspired by the god. I am inspired by the god—I must say now and here what I am inspired to say.' He again made as though to leave the couch.

'But wait a moment,' said Thrasyllus mildly. 'There is a serious dilemma. You must help us to solve it, Titus Aemilius. True, we must listen to a god-inspired poet. But we cannot allow him to start until we know that he is truly god-inspired, and this we cannot know until he starts.'

Titus emptied another glass of wine, eyeing Thrasyllus balefully. 'All right, Titus,' said Lollia. 'He was only jesting. You shall give us your poem. Be patient for a few minutes.' She turned towards Drusilla on her left and whispered, 'If only I can keep him quiet for a bit we can break up. I'm afraid of him when he gets like this. He's quite reckless. I wish he would drink so much that he couldn't speak at all. Let's find things to talk about without stopping and perhaps he'll go to sleep. Metella, ask Thrasyllus about Vesuvius. He knows everything.' Then she explained that Metella, ever since she had arrived, had been saying that it was very risky to live under a volcano. 'Though Pericles,' added Metella—'that's our slave—says that the learned men agree that Vesuvius is dead.'

'So they do,' said Thrasyllus. 'There's no doubt about it. There's no heat nowadays, no smoke; house-rents at Pompeii are as high as the mountain itself and the safest investment in Italy. Nothing else is certain. Floods, fires, storms—you never know

when they may not come to destroy you. But when a volcano has consumed all its material, like Vesuvius, it's done once and for all, and you can sleep quietly beneath it. Why, do you know a poet has just written a book of verse about volcanoes and he had to take Aetna in Sicily for his subject? I can tell you about it because I've been shown the poem very privately. Not a soul in Rome has seen it or is to be allowed to see it until it is actually published; the author, he said so himself, only showed it to me as a great privilege. But Aetna — now there's a volcano for you, not like this dull and dead Vesuvius!

Lollia protested. 'De Mortuis nil nisi bonum! What would Pompeii do without benign Vesuvius?'

Thrasyllus lifted up a finger. 'There's a funny story in that poem. It says that being threatened by a volcanic outbreak, one man took his gold and another his arms, while a third, who carried off his poems, lost his life, overwhelmed by their weight.'

'Poor fellow!' Gaius was malicious, looking round for approval. 'Just when the wings of inspiration would have been so useful to him! Was it the quantity or the quality of the poems, I wonder, that destroyed him?'

Titus, who had been muttering snatches of verse to himself, looked angrily at Gaius and Thrasyllus and then, when he saw that Cassius was grinning from the opposite table, raised himself on one elbow. 'They are mocking me, Lollia Claudia. They cannot mock poetry without mocking me. They say my poems were heavy so that I could not escape from a volcano. I heard them. They thought I did not hear them but I heard them. And my poems were not heavy because I am here, therefore I cannot have been weighed down as they say I was. They want to stop me from reciting my poems, so they say that I was overwhelmed by a volcano because, if I was, then I cannot recite.' He wagged his head.

Lollia renewed her efforts. 'Nonsense, it wasn't you at all, Titus. Your poems are as light as air, so it couldn't be you. Have some more to drink. Thrasyllus, what's this story about your colleague Seleucus being banished? Do tell us. Titus, listen!'

'It's true enough. The Emperor reads a lot, you know, and then at dinner he likes to talk about the books he's reading. He tells his guests about them, he brings up questions out of them for

discussion. Seleucus wanted to make a good impression, so he inquired secretly from the servants what books the Emperor was studying. Then he himself read them and came with all the answers ready. But the Emperor is not easily taken in. He soon suspected what had happened —

‘He suspects everybody,’ broke in Titus, who had been listening with open impatience.

‘He asked special questions of Seleucus, laying little traps for him.’

‘He lays traps for everybody,’ said Titus, and Gaius stirred, looking uneasily at Drusilla.

‘Until,’ Thrasyllus went on, ‘the Emperor was quite certain of what had been going on and then, saying nothing to Seleucus, he made the servants confess. He banished Seleucus and I should be surprised’ — here he looked curiously at Titus — ‘if that is the end of it. It is a mistake to offend Tiberius Claudius Caesar.’

‘Or Gaius Claudius Caesar,’ said Drusilla, smiling fondly at Gaius, whose hands were trembling.

Titus struck in with a loud, defiant voice. He looked straight at Gaius. ‘A poet is inspired. He is raised above mankind. A Caesar is nothing to him. A Caesar only becomes divine when he is dead, if a vote of the Senate can really make him so. A poet is a god by being a poet.’ He reflected for a moment. ‘Especially if he is an Aemilius already.’ This pleased him, for, turning to Lollia, he said, ‘I am an Aemilius myself, Lollia Claudia.’ He spoke appealingly. ‘You agree that I am an Aemilius, don’t you, Lollia Claudia? I should tell you all that I have written a poem about Troy. I have to recite it at this party. That is why this party is being held. Gaius Caesar may not like it, but a poet is more than any Caesar.’

Lollia again tried to divert the talk. ‘Don’t be ridiculous, Titus,’ she said. Then, ‘Gaius, what’s this message that the Emperor has sent to his Governors telling them not to tax the provincials too heavily?’

‘Yes, he’s pleased about that. The message was that they were to shear the sheep, not skin them. He’s down on all that sort of thing, you know. You have only to squeeze the tax-payers or take bribes, or interfere with the religion of the governed, and in no time at all you come home in disgrace. The provincials

ought to love him if the Romans don't. It's different now from the good old days of the Republic.'

'The Republic!' broke in Titus. 'The good old days when a poet could say what he liked without having to ask anyone's permission! Why?' he looked round, calling them all to attention. 'Because there were no Emperors!' Then suddenly, 'Why doesn't the Emperor like ants? Guess why Tiberius Caesar doesn't like ants.' He smiled foolishly at them.

Gaius half rose in his place, scowling and frightened. 'Well, tell us why the Emperor doesn't like ants.'

'Because,' said Titus, 'he found one morning that a horde of ants had got at his pet snake and that was the end of the snake. Then it occurred to him that the ants were the Roman people, and who, I wonder' — he tittered — 'was the snake?'

'We must be going,' said Gaius, much agitated. He looked towards Thrasyllus and then towards Cassius. 'He's not only drunk, he's mad. I mustn't stop here. He's talking treason.' He began to rise, but Titus protested loudly that they must hear his poem, jumped up, and standing at the end of the couch, began loudly to declaim —

'Oh, beauteous City, thrice as old as Rome' —

No one took any notice of him. Gaius was now talking earnestly to Thrasyllus, Lucius had joined Metella as though to protect her, Cassius, who had risen, was watching Titus closely. Lollia hurried up to Titus, took him by the arm and tried to pull him away. Disengaging himself, he began to address her ceremoniously —

'Oh, beauteous lady, thrice as —'

'Now don't tell me I'm thrice as old as Rome,' Lollia said, trying to divert him.

'Thrice as *fair* as Rome,' he said, as if correcting a deliberate mistake. 'Now I must go on.'

Cassius had come up close. 'Stop, you fool,' he said, 'and get out quickly. Didn't you hear? It's different now from the days of the Republic.'

Titus, looking him up and down, said with stiff dignity, 'A Cassius should know. There was a Cassius in the days of Julius Caesar, and there is a Cassius now. But it is different from the

days of the Republic.' He raised a wine glass. 'I drink to Cassius!' he said, 'and, having drunk, he leaned towards Cassius, tapped him on the chest, and said cunningly, 'But who knows to which Cassius?' The others were leaving the room, Gaius and Thrasyllus whispering together, Drusilla and Lollia immediately behind, then Lucius, comforting Metella, who was saying urgently, 'Get him away, Lucius. Make him come; what will they do to him?' Cassius remained composed and watchful, standing by Titus, who gazed first at the empty couches and then at the door, frowned as though greatly perplexed, and turned to Cassius for explanations. 'They're gone,' he said, 'and I had only just begun. Lollia Claudia said that I should recite my poem on Troy to Gaius Caesar, and now he's gone without hearing it. It's very, very inconsiderate. He won't listen to my poem. He won't hear my poem. He's a tyrant — like Tiberius. They have killed liberty and there is no Cassius to restore her. There is a Cassius, but I am sorry to say' — he addressed himself to the empty tables — 'that this Cassius will never say a word, will never lift a finger, against tyranny.'

Cassius remained impassive, indifferent, like a guard with his prisoner. Thrasyllus appeared in the doorway, calling him, and he marched briskly away. Titus leaned against the edge of his couch, saying with concentration and much shaking of his head, 'Cassius and the Dictator Caesar — Cassius Chaerea and Caesar the Emperor — it's very different now.'

Lollia, Lucius and Metella came in and approached him. They all insisted that he must go to bed and sleep. They told him, but he barely understood, that he must go over to the island early next day to ask pardon of Gaius. At last he allowed himself to be led away by Lucius. As Lollia and Metella rejoined the others they heard Thrasyllus saying gravely to Cassius, 'Tell him in the morning, then, as soon as he can understand.' Gaius added, 'Make no mistake about it.' Drusilla had her arm in that of Gaius, who looked angry and wretched. They said good-bye to Lollia, who accompanied them to the door; the slaves had already gone down to the boat which was waiting for them. Metella detained Thrasyllus. 'What did you mean?' she said, 'about telling him in the morning?'

'My dear young lady,' he replied, 'do not distress yourself.

These are —' he hesitated for a moment — 'unhappy days. This is a bad affair, but it can't be helped. After all, remember what Seleucus suffered merely for being inquisitive.'

'But you only said that banishment might not be the end of it.'

'It was not the end of it, but I didn't want to say that he was dead. And that was just for questioning the Emperor's servants. But I must hurry; they are waiting for me.'

Cassius, who had been seeing Gaius off, came back. Lucius, reporting that Titus had gone to sleep, joined them. They all stood looking at one another.

'What is it you have to tell him in the morning?' said Metella to Cassius. Lucius had come up and put his arm round her.

Cassius spoke as though it were mere routine. 'To make an end of himself.'

'But you can't,' cried Metella. 'Gaius has no right. He has no power. The Emperor could, but not Gaius.'

Cassius shrugged his shoulders. 'The Emperor will if he hears of it, only he won't give Titus an option. Gaius couldn't do anything else. He may be saving the lives of some of us, perhaps his own, certainly mine.' He smiled pleasantly. 'My name is unfortunate in these days. It will not look too well if it gets about that we have all been at a party where it was discussed whether Cassius Chaerea might imitate his notorious namesake.'

'Your name damns us all.' Lollia looked at him with annoyance.

'It damns Gaius, and so saves us,' he answered. 'But we are all damned without that if Titus lives.'

'He was drunk,' said Lucius, 'he didn't know what he was saying. He'll know nothing of it in the morning.'

Cassius smiled thinly. 'I'll tell him. Since my namesake's time you can't threaten Caesar even if you're drunk, and not though you're a poet, too.'

'Titus must go over to the island in the morning,' declared Metella, and Lucius nodded approval. 'Gaius will have got over his fright and will forgive him. I don't believe any of the slaves heard, so no one will know.'

'He can't go to the island.' Cassius shook his head. 'I have orders.'

'Then I'll go myself,' said Metella. 'I'll see Drusilla and ask her to plead with Gaius.'

Cassius screwed up his mouth. 'I'm sorry, but it's all provided for. I have orders that no one here is to be allowed to cross until all is over. I think Gaius and Thrasyllus foresaw what some of those here might want to do and were determined to prevent it.'

'All I want to do,' said Valeria, who all this time had been too terrified to speak, 'is to get away. My husband won't like my being mixed up in this at all. He wants to become Praetor next year and he'll say this spoils his chances and that it's all my fault, though I'm sure I've scarcely said a word about anything but Quintus. I want to get away.'

'I don't suppose anyone will stop longer than can be helped, Valeria,' said Lollia sharply. 'I'm certainly not going to stop myself.'

'If we can't go to the island, can we write?' asked Metella. 'Will you pass a letter, Cassius?'

'I've no orders against that.'

'Then I'll write to Gaius now and send it early in the morning.'

'No, you won't,' said Lucius. 'If anyone is to write, I will. You're not being brought into this. Shall I tell him I'm writing for all of you?'

Valeria objected sharply. 'No, not for me. I want to get away.'

'I'm an officer under orders,' said Cassius.

'You can write for me.' Metella was scornful.

'And for me, if you write for Metella,' said Lollia, 'but I would not write for Metella if I were you, Lucius.'

'I'm not going to write for Metella. I'll write for myself alone, but you'll see — he won't listen. He can't afford to let Titus live. He daren't.' Cassius, Lollia, Valeria, all agreed with him.

In the morning Lucius sent his letter. Titus, informed by Cassius what was expected of him, nevertheless tried to secure permission to go over to the island. It was refused. He tried to send a letter and was told it was impossible. He heard that Lucius had written and waited till the afternoon to see if an answer came. None came, and then Cassius Chaerea spoke to him again. In the late afternoon Titus returned to his own house, a few miles off. Cassius went with him and in mid-evening returned. He called at Lollia's house, said — 'He had his veins opened,' and took boat to the island, where he reported to Gaius that Titus

was dead. He returned in a short time bearing a letter to Lollia from Gaius. Gaius invited Lollia to come and dine with him and Drusilla in a few days' time and to bring Metella with her. Lucius was not invited, nor did Gaius make any reference to him or to his letter asking mercy for Titus.

'As though I would go!' Metella was in a fury. 'He is no better than a murderer.'

'Yet it would be wise to go,' said Lollia. 'He is not used to have invitations refused, and after last night it would be marked. You — or we — should not offend him, seeing what he will be to-morrow or the next day. It only means waiting a few days more.'

Metella shook her head peremptorily. 'No, I won't go. Let him think what he likes. We are leaving to-morrow, aren't we, Lucius?'

'Yes, Gaius or no Gaius, we leave to-morrow. I'm sorry, Lollia, but we will take the chance together.'

Lollia nodded. 'I know. As you always do. Oh, I don't blame you. It's been a beastly business. I'm sorry I brought you here, for things don't seem to be going very well. Gaius is annoyed with Lucius for interfering and he'll be suspicious when Metella and I don't go over there. I'll have to invent some excuse. I've been taken ill, or Metella's father is dying and has sent for her. I think I'll leave to-morrow myself. Gaius can't really be surprised. I'll write to Thrasyllus to smooth things over. But Valeria will talk, you know; she can't help it. Everyone will know. She's got everything out of Cassius already. Oh, here she is.'

'I'm going to-morrow morning,' Valeria announced. 'Nothing will stop me. But you two are going over to the island, Cassius says. Gaius has invited you, so you'll have to go.'

'Unfortunately we can't go,' said Lollia, 'we're all leaving to-morrow. Metella's father is terribly ill and has written for her and my doctor orders me an immediate rest in Rome. He says that nowhere else will do me the slightest good.'

'I'm glad the invitation isn't for me,' said Valeria, 'because if it had been I should have to accept it or my husband would never forgive me. He'll be frightfully pleased when he hears that I let Gaius know how clever Quintus is. But nothing would make me stay now, not even an order from the Emperor.'

Lollia made a grimace. 'Let's hope we don't get that, or stay we must.'

They left the next day as they had planned. Valeria started at dawn, Lollia with Lucius and Metella a little later. At Naples they met the father and mother of Titus who, on the evening before, had been urgently summoned to Surrentum on the ground that their son had suffered an accident. Lollia had to tell them what had happened.

At Puteoli, a little further along the coast, one of the family messengers saw them. He was from Comum, bearing letters from Caecilia and Publius. Caecilia pictured them enjoying the country air and the sea on their first holiday together; they must prolong it, she insisted, to the full. Publius wrote that at Comum that day the people, Caecilia and himself among them, were gaily celebrating the festival of Bacchus, the wine-god. 'I like to think,' he said, 'that at the same moment, you also, far away in the south, may be celebrating the same wine-god, "so apt for dance and mirth and play", the comforter "who to stricken mortals brings his gift of peace".'

'Poor Titus!' said Metella.

CHAPTER IV

It was the last week in May when Lucius and Metella returned to the house on the Esquiline. When they entered it and walked through the familiar rooms, the cloud began to lift from their minds. Here were the household gods whom they sincerely worshipped. The slaves were glad to see them, the dogs went frantic, the rooms were friendly, the walls were sheltering. Here was the furniture in the old places so that, like children, laughing at each other delightedly, they ran and sat on one chair after another. Here were the lamps which, when the darkness came, would light up their little enclosed world, making all their own. Here, solid beneath their feet, were the elephants and rhinoceroses, still marching with unshakable dignity round Publius's mosaic. Here was the precious fabric of an uneventful, settled way. Here was home; here, could they but remain obscure, was

peace of mind; here was security. The nightmare life of Capreae was not for them. They had been in it but they were not of it. They had escaped and they would not return. They would do what they should as good citizens of Rome, but they did not belong to a world where a mis-spoken, befuddled word meant death. At least so they felt when they came back to their home.

At first they feared what Roman rumour would make of Titus's death, but this time they were spared. The worst said was that Titus had made treasonable proposals to Cassius Chaerea, who had reported them to Tiberius, who had put Titus to death. But Valeria, though she magnified her own part in the affair, gave a fair account of Titus's folly and Gaius's resentment. She had much to say about the offence which Metella and Lucius had given to Gaius, but since Lucius was obviously unimportant and Metella was everywhere known for her impetuosity, and since Gaius was overshadowed by the Emperor, no great embarrassment was caused. Valeria wrote a flattering letter to Gaius. She received an affable reply in which Gaius spontaneously said he hoped to help her husband Marcus in his political career. At this Marcus regarded his wife with a respect which he rarely felt for her except when he contemplated the military genius of their boy Quintus. But Lucius and Metella again felt the chill of the last days at Surrentum when they heard, a little later, that the story of the dinner had reached the Emperor's ears, that he had exiled Titus's father and mother, on the ground that they should have brought up their son better, and that Lollia's principal slave had been put to death, as one who had heard too much. Besides this a careful inquiry was made into Lollia's past in order to discover what part, if any, she had taken in politics. 'Let them rake over my past,' she said with a delighted laugh, her mouth going back to her ears. 'They'll find nothing there except men, wine and song, very expensive but not yet treasonable.' The Emperor's displeasure was, however, conveyed to her and she was forbidden, for the time, to visit her house at Surrentum or go anywhere near Capreae. Rome might have been more excited about it all had it not been distracted. Magnificent Games were held at this time, with much killing of wild beasts. The spectacle was all the more popular because the Emperor had

been condemning such displays. The crowds openly muttered their disapproval of the sour old man.

In the middle of June, Metella found that she was going to have a child. In August, with its heat, she felt that she could not endure Rome. Her struggle against marriage to Aulus, the overthrow of Sejanus and her sudden happiness, the danger in which her father had stood, the miserable fate of Titus, and the anxiety which she constantly felt lest she should be involving Lucius in danger, weighed heavily upon her. The heat was abnormal, the City was dirty and evil-smelling and noisy to a point that equalled even Caecilia's imaginings. Caecilia, when she heard the news, said that Comum was the very place for Metella. Publius agreed that it was the very place but said that it was useless to think that Metella would consent to live in a place, however healthful and however well supplied with books, that was so far from Lucius. In this he was right and for a time Metella refused to leave Rome at all. At last she consented to go to the farm near Antium which was so close to Rome that Lucius could come to her often. He insisted, against her will, that Pericles should go with her, and eventually he had his way. Metella appealed to Iris to say that she did not need Pericles, but Iris refused. 'The Master here in Rome can look after himself. All the slaves will protect him, but we know nothing about the slaves at the farm or on the neighbouring farms. Of course you must have with you someone like Pericles. He can run back to Rome sometimes to take a look at the house and give the Master a helping hand if he needs one. Besides, the Master will always worry if you don't take Pericles.' This settled it. At the end of the month, Metella, taking with her Iris and Pericles and a few other slaves, went to the farm.

Metella spent much time with Iris in these days, strolling about the bay where her father had been so rashly innocent, or by the little stream which, at the rear of the farm, flowed to the sea. Here was a path which crossed the stream just before its last plunge downhill, and led, after a few hundred yards to a large farm store: tools were kept here, there were some sheep pens, and a crowd of hens for which Iris cared. Close by was a ditch which marked the boundary between the farm and a neighbouring large estate. On this many slaves were employed. One

evening, as they were standing near the ditch and watching a cloud of noisy birds making for the tree-tops, Metella and Iris saw a troop of slave labourers crossing the fields not far away. Some of them were in rags, some wore chains, some looked wholly brutal, all dragged themselves wearily along. One, a hefty fellow, was cursing two of the guards, themselves slaves, who replied by lashing him with leathern thongs. The troop were slaves under punishment who were being driven to the wretched quarters, half-barracks and half-prison where, some of them shackled to the walls, they were confined at night.

Iris cried out with anger as she saw the blows falling and Metella shouted to the guards. The men could not hear what she was saying, but, perhaps thinking that they were being urged on, fell to with fresh energy until at last their victim stopped abusing them and ran ahead, while they threw clods and stones after him, roaring with laughter.

'It is a shame,' cried Iris in a fury, 'that slaves should beat a slave. How can they do it? They should die rather than do it.'

'There are good slaves and bad slaves,' replied Metella, 'just as there are good freedmen and bad. It is partly their master's fault. He has a bad reputation hereabouts; he ill-treats his slaves and encourages his overseers, slaves themselves, to do the same. They have the power, and, because they have it, abuse it, just as their master does and just as Caesar does for the same reason. We talk treason, don't we, you and I?' she said, laying her hand on Iris's shoulder.

'You treat me like a friend, not like a slave.'

'You are my friend. My father and mother taught me to think that way. You know my father was so pleased when he found that he could make a friend of Pericles. He thinks it is another bond between him and the great orator Cicero because Cicero had a slave called Tiro, whom he freed and whom he declared he was proud to call his friend.'

The two guards, having locked up their prisoners, were returning across the fields. Iris pointed at them. 'Why don't the slaves unite,' she said, 'and fight the masters? There are tens of thousands of them; they could seize the arms and they would be free until they won or were killed.'

Metella shook her head. 'They tried that a long time ago.

They were put down and their end was horrible. How could bands of slaves resist Rome when great countries have failed? No one can resist Rome.'

'My people could,' said Iris. 'They will, too. Our God Jehovah will help us. He always does.'

'Yet Romans rule Judaea.'

'Now, yes, but in Jehovah's good time my people will drive out the Romans. He can give the whole world to the Jews. To him all the other peoples together, and even the Romans, are as the drop of a bucket and the small dust of the balance. He has always saved us in the end. There was a King once in Syria who invaded our country. He said he would turn Jerusalem into a common burying-place of the Jews. He was a great King; he thought that he could rule the waves and the sea and weigh the mountains in his scales and reach to the stars of heaven. At first he crushed Judas, our leader, so that Judas fled with a few followers to the mountains, where they lived after the manner of the beasts. But then Judas gathered men about him and in a great battle, when he was hard pressed, five comely men, on horses with gold bridles, came from heaven and protected him while they shot arrows and lightnings at his enemies so that they were blind and full of trouble.'

'Why,' said Metella, 'that's what our own Twin Brethren did when they came from heaven to help the early Romans. And the gods were always doing the same thing at Troy.'

Iris protested hotly. 'It's not the same at all. Those were false gods, both at Rome and at Troy. Everyone has false gods except the Jews, and Jehovah will send his horsemen to help the Jews to victory when he thinks that they have deserved it by being faithful to him.'

'Well,' said Metella, 'you are a good Jew, but all those stories seem much the same to me, and I notice that it's always in some war long, long ago that the gods give help to men. I wish they'd help those wretched men whom we've just watched, and that I were there to see. I'd lend the gods a hand. Did your people keep slaves, Iris? I expect they did like everyone else if they made war. Did your people make wars?'

'They fought and fought, but they had to for their lives. Yes, they made slaves, especially of the women captives, but not so

many, for they killed and killed. They had to,' she repeated. 'For them it was kill or be killed. They hewed their enemies in pieces. They took the Edomites and threw them down by thousands from high rocks. They captured the Ammonites and put them under saws and harrows of iron and axes of iron and made them to walk through the brick-kilns. Yes, they were cruel, but that was what the Ammonites and the Edomites, the Midianites and the Amalekites did to the Jews whenever they had the chance. It was our God Jehovah who bade my people destroy and spare not. It is all written in our Books.' She spoke as if the word was final for Metella as much as for herself.

Metella smiled at her fondly. 'I do not think,' she said, 'that I like your Jehovah. He is not a kind God and I sincerely hope that he won't insist on the Jews conquering the Romans. Now, let's go in.'

One day, about a week later, when Metella accompanied Iris on one of her errands to the shed, they heard a low moaning. They found a woman stretched on a heap of sacks in a corner. She was a slave who, while working on the neighbouring estate, had been seized by the pains of childbirth. She had just managed to drag herself to shelter. The birth was near at hand. Metella sent Iris running to the farm, telling her to send with all haste the old woman who had come to be with her till the birth of her own child. Iris herself, and other slaves, were to follow with blankets, a brazier, wine. Iris went, and the wise old woman came and did all she could. The slave, ill-fed, weak and ill had no fight in her and seemed about to die. Metella, Iris and the old woman watched over her hour by hour, day and night, until at last it was certain that she would recover. The child, a boy, gave them little anxiety. On the first day Metella had sent word to the owner that the slave, in her extremity, had sought shelter on the farm and was being cared for. He replied with apologies that Metella should have been troubled, expressed his annoyance with the slave, and said that he would have her brought back at once. Metella sent him word that the woman was too ill and must be left where she was. To Iris she said that if the woman survived she would buy her, and the child, from the owner, or, if she died, the child. She sent a message at once to her father and mother at Comum to say what she proposed to do. Her

mother approved in a long letter which gave much good advice about treatment and bade Metella take this opportunity to gain as much experience of handling babies as she could. Publius also approved but pretended some alarm —

‘I am proud of you, my dearest Metella, for you not only pity the wretched, as I do, but act at once to help them, which is where I fail. I see and praise the better, I pursue the worse. Yes, yes, by all means buy this poor creature and her boy. Bring him up with yours — it will be a boy, of course — if you choose. It will be good for both of them. All the same I warn you — don’t try to buy all the slaves of our bullying neighbour — I have met him and he’s not our sort at all — or all the miserable ill-treated slaves in Italy. I predict that if you go that way your father will soon be bankrupt and also he will be arrested for conspiring; the charge will be that he was organizing a new slaves’ war. Be cautious, therefore, and wary; listen to that wise old man, your father. But, about buying this slave and her baby, of course you must! Persuade our neighbour, if you can, but should he be obstinate, mention that I am bringing forward a motion in the Senate about the treatment of slaves and that the Emperor will take notice of the instances I give.’

Metella, taking Iris with her, went to see the neighbour. He was a middle-aged, jovial, vulgar Knight who regarded his slaves as cattle. He was delighted to have a visit from Metella. He was most cordial to her and eyed Iris with approval. He was amused that Metella should want to buy the woman and child but he refused to take payment. She seemed, he said, to have saved the life of his slave though she was of little value, and anyway the child had been born on Metella’s farm. He hoped that now he had met Metella, who lived so near, he would see her again soon. He inquired facetiously whether Metella would not let him have her handsome slave in exchange for the new acquisition.

‘Loathsome creature!’ said Metella, as they walked back across the fields, ‘but we have got what we want. Now the mother will look after her baby, and I, when she comes, shall look after my girl —’

'Boy!' protested Iris. 'It will be a boy.'

'I ought to know! It is a girl, and you shall be her second mother until you have a baby of your own, who, I hope, will also be a girl.'

'No, mine will be a boy. I long ago decided that it should be a boy. I shall tell my husband — if I am ever free to marry.'

'You will undoubtedly tell him that, and everything else that you want, and I expect you'll get it. Now listen to me. To me this woman's child shall be as good, and as free, as my own. Why should he be a slave any more than my own child? He comes into the world a new life, though no one asked his leave to bring him into it. It is all a question of who is strong and who is weak. No one has the right to make a slave of him any more than they ever had of you, and you are right: the slaves would do justly if they united to destroy their masters, but they have not the power. I hate to think that you are a slave. Some day you shall be free. Until then you are my friend and you shall be the friend and protectress of my little girl.'

'Boy!' said Iris, and they laughed. Later that day, as Metella watched her, gentle and grave, caring for the woman's child, her heart warmed towards the slave-girl. Then she thought of the millions of slaves, many as lovable as Iris, who had lived and died, and were living and dying, in every land. 'It has always been the same,' she thought, 'among every people, in every age, under every religion, and so it will always be. There will always be the strong and the weak, the enslaver and the slave, to the world's end. All one can do is to befriend a few slaves here and there in the vast multitude, loving them as oneself.' That she would do with Iris, as her father with Pericles.

In mid-October Thyrsus came to the farm. Just before he arrived Pericles returned from a visit to Rome. Thyrsus, he reported to Metella, was in the City. He had been to the house twice while Lucius was away at work. He had asked many questions of the slaves about the members of the family, their movements and their plans, saying that he wanted all the information that he could get for his patron Aulus. Thyrsus had also been seen in other important households from whose freedmen and slaves, his old acquaintances, he had gathered news about what was happening and what was expected in politics and society.

'A most business-like report,' said Metella, much impressed that it should come from Pericles. 'How did you manage it?'

Pericles was gratified. 'I was certain, madam, that Thyrsus would come again. Aulus Cornelius wants all the information that he can get about you and your family. That is, I think, the real reason why Thyrsus was bought by him and then freed. So, when we first came here, I arranged with the most trustworthy slaves to take notice of all that Thyrsus did and said when he came back, both in our house and elsewhere, and then to report it to me. One of them followed him wherever he went. It was a message from them about Thyrsus that made me go to Rome. If I may confess it, madam, I have been very conscious that I failed the Master and Mistress — and also you — when Thyrsus and Parmenio deceived us all. I felt that I must not be taken in again, nor live so much in books as to be ignorant of men. In fact,' — and he smiled gravely at Metella — 'if I may say so, I conquered my bookishness by turning over a new leaf.'

'Don't conquer it too much, Pericles, or I should not like you half as much. Did you tell the young Master about Thyrsus?'

'Yes, and he told me to say that while you should receive Thyrsus civilly, as arranged, there was no reason why he should be allowed to make himself offensive.'

'Oh, I think he'll be reasonable. After all, we too can tell stories to Aulus, who is too much the patrician to let an ex-slave insult or injure us. Thyrsus may behave rudely or hint what he can do to us, but it will take more than his gold ring to ruin me or my family. Pericles, I wonder if he will notice — about me, I mean, and tell Aulus Cornelius what is going to happen?'

'He knows already. It was one of the first questions that he asked. I am afraid he does not wish us well, madam. I think perhaps he wishes no one well. They told me that when he heard the news about you he was delighted, snapped his fingers with merriment and prayed to Juppiter that he might be the first to break the news to Aulus Cornelius in order that he might watch his face. "He will be in torment", Thyrsus said, rubbing his hands with pleasure, "and he will try to conceal it because I am there, but he will not succeed. He never can conceal it." I gathered, madam, that Thyrsus intended to learn all that he could about the coming event in order to make the news more

painful to his patron. He is ill-natured, madam. He has no ground for grievance against Aulus Cornelius, I am sure. On the contrary, he owes it to Aulus that he is free and, if he speaks truly, well-off and influential. They serve each other's interests, those two, but I should say there is no love between them.'

'Let them do as they like so long as they do not meddle with us, and with my little girl. It will be a girl, won't it, Pericles?'

'Yes, madam.'

'Oh, Pericles, how splendid! Tell me how you know.'

'Because you want it, madam, I am sure it will be so.'

'I hope you are right, but have you no other reason, Pericles?'

'No, madam, these things are inscrutable. You may have another Augustus or another Cleopatra, or, if you will allow me, both.'

'I would prefer Cleopatra except that I remember Augustus drove her to suicide. But who knows anything about a child when she is born? Now let's consider what to do if Thyrsus comes.'

Thyrsus arrived one afternoon. He had a letter, he said, which he must deliver personally to Metella. She was not well, she rested a good deal in these days, and had retired to her room. He asked whether he might stay the night and she sent word that he might; she would see him in the morning. He had arrived, Pericles noticed, without the gold ring; he was not apparently taking the risk of wearing it in public. He spent his time talking to the slaves and to Pericles. He was agreeable, walked round the farm with Pericles and stopped near the shed to speak pleasantly to Iris, asking her about her work. On their return he sat with Pericles until bedtime. He said that both Sextus Cornelius and Aulus were trying to secure their recall, with members of their house and friends to help them, but so far were they from success that they had not yet succeeded in getting their case considered by the Emperor. Aulus, he said, had not moved an inch from his determination about Metella; somehow or other he meant to have his way; he was indifferent about the means. 'I hear,' Thyrsus said, 'that she is going to have a child? He sent me to find out the news, but he won't be grateful to me when he gets it, Pericles.'

'I heard you had been asking questions in Rome.'

'I did, indeed, and I can tell you they were all guessing about the child, whether it would be a boy or a girl, what his hair and

his eyes would be like, and whether he would resemble his father or his mother. The women servants were betting on it. I shall tell my patron it is the general opinion that the child is going to resemble his father, Lucius Paetus. Then, next spring, when I have been to Rome again, I shall return and tell him that I was right and that his Metella's offspring is the image of her husband, Lucius Paetus.' Thyrsus rocked gently to and fro on his stool, his arms crossed, looking at Pericles with half-shut eyes, his fat face all puckered up with glee.

'You hate him?'

'I hate him. He has youth, rank, even power, or will have when he returns to Rome, and I have none. He could ruin me, perhaps he could get me made a slave again. But he suffers because he wants one particular woman and another man has her. Oh, yes, he suffers. I have seen him, I have watched him. He has no peace. It is worse for him, I believe, than if he were here and saw her living an ordinary life, for in his imagination he sees them always together, loving each other, in each other's arms. Whatever in his jealousy he imagines, he believes. This spring I told him that I had heard that Lucius Paetus, being concerned with Syria, was being sent there with his wife on some mission of inquiry; and that the boat would put in at Cyprus. It was not true, of course, none of it, but believe me' — Thyrsus chuckled — 'he went down to the harbour day after day to meet each ship in case Metella was on one of them. I have seen him watching the faces of the women as they came ashore and going aboard to make sure that he had not missed one. Then I told him, later on, that it was being said that Metella was going to have a child.' Thyrsus bent double with laughter. 'In the day he could not eat, he could not talk or write or settle to anything. At night he could not sleep; he wandered from room to room; I have known him go out in the darkness and roam about until he was exhausted. He is being burned alive. When I tell him next time that the child is truly coming it will stoke the fire. Why not? Why should only slaves and ex-slaves suffer? Let the masters have a taste. Pray what colour, Pericles, are the eyes of the father, Lucius? Has not his hair little ripples at the back? Do not his ears stand out more than they should? The child, I say, will have the eyes, the brown, caressing eyes, the rippling hair and the ears of his father. The

humble Lucius has given the noble Metella — who was betrothed to Aulus, or so he says — a child like to himself.' Thyrsus stood up, slapped his sides and gave a little delighted skip as he had done in Publius's garden. 'That's what I am going to tell Aulus Cornelius — not once but many times.' Thoroughly pleased, he bade good night to Pericles. At the door, however, he looked back. 'He was pretty bad when I came away, but he'll be worse when I get back. I'll see to that.' Thyrsus was delighted at the glumness of Pericles.

Next morning Metella sent for him. He was quietly respectful, asked after her health and that of her parents, and said that, he must report to her that he had left Aulus well but, of course, anxious to return to Italy. Aulus, he said, hated Cyprus and everyone there, especially the Roman officials, his fellow-exiles and the Greek inhabitants.

'Is there anyone else there?' asked Metella.

'No, no one else. He detests them all.'

Metella asked him about his own movements, and he explained that since he saw her in April he had travelled twice to Cyprus. But most of his time he had spent in Alexandria and Antioch, partly, he said, on profitable business but partly on affairs of State. He hinted that he was acting as a confidential adviser to the Prefect of Egypt and the Governor of Syria; both of them, he suggested, had given him letters for the Emperor's household at Capreae which they would not entrust to any other hands. He then said that he would go out to stroll round the farm. Metella would, no doubt, give him a reply for Aulus later in the day. As he handed the letter to her she noticed that he was again wearing the gold ring.

Not many minutes afterwards Iris entered the shed to obtain food for her hens. She heard the light scuffle of footsteps. As she turned the door was thrust to, shutting out most of the light, and she saw Thyrsus dropping in its place the heavy bar. For a second her wits forsook her, then she started for the nearest of the two window spaces in the walls of the shed. She was too late. Thyrsus was on her immediately. With a sudden shake and twist he threw her to the ground and as she fell, wrenching at her cloak, he tore it from her, leaving her only with a short tunic beneath. She made no sound but while she struck at him fiercely with her

feet she trust her hand beneath the tunic seeking her dagger and at the same time tried to rise. He seized one of her feet, jerked it upwards and threw her on her back again. Then he saw the girdle and the handle of the dagger. 'Oho!' he said, 'so that's what the fool Pericles meant! He said something about your having a special name because you carried a dagger.' He came down beside her, seized her hands in one of his and tossed the dagger away. There was a slight sound of someone gently trying the door, but Thyrsus was too intent to hear anything, bending over Iris, pinning her body down with the hand that gripped her wrists, with the other thrusting back now her head, now her legs, as she struggled to rise, and, in between, tearing away the tunic which was her only covering. Now, as she writhed, she screamed so that Thyrsus did not hear a sudden scuffling at one of the windows. He did not see or hear Pericles scrambling through. He just caught the sound as Pericles jumped down to the floor, but when he looked up Pericles was already rushing furiously at him. Seizing him by the arm and neck, with one knee planted in his ribs to increase the impetus, Pericles sent him spinning across the floor. In the same instant, picking up Iris's cloak, he flung it to her, saying 'By the window! I'll see to him. Tell the Mistress.' She hesitated, as though she was loath to leave him. He repeated the order curtly, and then, while he stood between her and Thyrsus, he put his fingers to his mouth and gave a loud shrill whistle. Iris darted to her dagger, picked it up and ran to the window. Someone outside lifted her through bodily, and, in a second, first one and then a second farmhand, tough-looking fellows, yellow-haired German slaves, came leaping through the window, each with a billet of wood in his hand and ranged up on either side of Pericles.

Thyrsus leapt up like a rubber ball and made as though he would rush on Pericles; then, taking in the other men, he checked himself, made a show of brushing the dirt of the floor from his clothes and said, swallowing hard —

'So, it's the Poet again! But this time, instead of sticking to Poetry he brings two ruffians to assault a freedman.'

Pericles, watching him, spoke mildly. 'I have been told that for a Poet I am practical. Hence these men. I have a job for them and I have trained them for it.'

'You had better have stuck to your poems,' Thyrsus sneered. 'I wonder you don't spout one now.'

'I will. I know a good one for you. Virgil advising the peasant how to deal with a poisonous snake —

'Take, shepherd, stones and stick, and as he rises
threatening and swells with hissing neck,
strike him down.'

The labourers moved to each side of Thyrsus, encircling him.

'Out of the way!' said Thyrsus, 'and you'—he addressed Pericles—'open that door! I am the freedman of Aulus Cornelius.' He moved towards the door, but the labourers were on each side of him, while Pericles barred the way in front. 'Now!' said Pericles, and the Germans leapt on Thyrsus, seized his arms, twisted them behind his back and before he could recover his balance Pericles, who had produced a piece of rope, had tied his wrists. Then the slaves leapt aside. Pericles said—'You are going as a prisoner to the Mistress. Will you go peaceably if I let you walk?'

Thyrsus scarcely moved his lips. His voice, when he spoke, was hoarse with anger. 'I am a freedman,' he said. 'You shall pay for this. Untie my hands! I tell you it will be better for you to untie my hands.'

Pericles shook his head. 'No! I do not trust you any more. If you promise to walk quietly you can go by yourself, with these two behind you, each with his club in case you try any tricks. But if you will not promise, you shall be carried! Remember what I said, because I mean it— "Strike the creature down!"'

Thyrsus, abusing him violently, sat down on a block of wood against the wall, protecting his back from attack. The slaves moved to either side of him.

'For the last time!' said Pericles, 'or must we take measures with you?' He waited a few seconds and again cried 'Now!' Thyrsus was undone by the position he had chosen. The slaves, seizing him suddenly by the feet, jerked him off the wood on to his back, one of them sat on his chest, the other on his legs, and Pericles, with another piece of rope, tied his ankles. 'Since you will not walk,' he said to Thyrsus, 'you must be carried like a beast.' He spoke to one of the Germans. 'Fetch one of those,'

pointing to a pile of strong wooden props in a corner. When the man brought it, 'String him up by the hands and feet,' said Pericles. 'Tie his hands first in front.' As they were doing this Thyrsus suddenly raised his head and fixed his teeth in the wrist of the man nearest to him. The other German at once fell on his knees and quietly, without excitement, throttled Thyrsus until he let go. Then they bound his wrists again, tied hands and feet to the pole, raised it on their shoulders and were ready to march. Pericles, seeing that the rope might cut into the flesh, for Thyrsus was heavy, bade them lower their burden; he passed a double thickness of rope round Thyrsus's back and tied it to the middle of the pole, thus taking much of the strain off hands and feet. They set off again. 'You see,' said Pericles to Thyrsus, walking by his side, and speaking confidentially, 'you make things hard for me. I would much sooner you walked, but I have to deliver you to the Mistress and I mean to do it. I am sure you will understand; you used to be so reasonable in the old days.' Thyrsus maintained a dull, stubborn silence, merely turning his head to look at Pericles from time to time. His lips moved and Pericles, leaning towards him, thought that he was muttering something about 'terrible Thyrsus'. 'But you know,' said Pericles earnestly, 'that was a joke. You took it seriously and look where you are now. You tried to be terrible; you were threatening the girl even when you were in Rome. And so there you are, strung up like a bear, and heaven knows what's going to happen to you when we get to the Mistress.'

When Thyrsus had left her, some time before, Metella read the letter from Aulus. It was more openly complaining. It reproached her for not writing to him. She could not deny, he said, that she had been as good as betrothed to him, that her father had fixed the day, but when Sejanus fell he had betrothed her to Lucius in a base, panic haste to save his own skin. Her father had used her simply as a bargaining piece, throwing her first to one man and then to another; he, Aulus, did not believe that she cared for Lucius Paetus and in any case he had his rights, which were that, but for an inconceivable reversal of fortune, she would long ago have been his wife and the mother of his child. Then he said he was sorry to hear that both she and her father were still creating danger for themselves. Was it true that

Publius, suspect either of conspiring, or of participation in forbidden rites, had had to retire to Northern Italy while she herself had so offended the great ones of Capreae that she had been curtly ordered to return to Rome from Surrentum? Was it true that the discreet and impeccable Lucius Paetus had offended even the easy-going Gaius and had been included, on his own account, in the same order? He hoped it was all untrue, for these things, he was afraid, promised ill for the future of all of them. Then there was another letter, written later, just before Thyrsus set off. His mood had changed, he was remorseful, and he begged her to believe that if he had reproached her it was because he loved her, he could not endure his life without her, he could not bear to think of her being with anybody else, and he had never ceased to love her, he would never give her up and some day, some day, when he came back to Rome she would still be his. 'It is not possible that after we had been brought to within a few days of our betrothal I should be deprived of you for my whole life. That would be too unjust. It is not possible.' He begged her forgiveness — 'but I mean all I have said.'

Metella, after reading, had sent for Pericles, but he could not be found. Then, after a time, Iris, on flying feet, arrived and told her story. She could, indeed, tell almost all that had happened, for after she had seen the Germans enter the shed she had listened at one of the windows, occasionally peeping in, and had only left when she saw Thyrsus finally tied up to the pole. She arrived at the farm not long before Pericles and his prisoner. Metella, listening, questioned her about her personal safety, then went out into the farmyard and, almost at once, the procession appeared with the body of Thyrsus swaying slightly from side to side. At this moment Pericles was bearing one end of the pole, for the load was heavy and he had relieved each of the carriers in turn. Handing over the burden he came forward to Metella. She bade him wait until the others had come up, then, 'Stand him on his feet,' she said. They loosed Thyrsus from the pole and set him upright, facing Metella. 'Now,' she said, 'Iris, say exactly what happened before Pericles arrived.' When Iris had finished, Metella ordered Pericles to say what he had seen and done. Some of the household servants and farm workers had gathered round, attracted by the sight of the well-known freedman carried

like an animal, and by the news, which quickly spread, of what had happened. Metella scarcely noticed them. Her face was set, her eyes angry. When Pericles had had his say and had answered her questions, she turned to Thyrsus, who had listened, silent and sullen, and said sternly, 'Well, you have heard them; what have you to say? Be truthful and be short. Nothing else is useful here.'

Thyrsus straightened up. He looked at her defiantly. 'What if it is true! She came to no harm.'

'She would have come to harm enough if you had had your way.'

He shrugged contemptuously. 'A slave-girl! There are plenty such. What difference does it make? How many men will she belong to before she is twenty? She might as well make a beginning now.' He raised his voice, shouting at Metella, 'A chit of a girl and you make all this fuss. And I'm a freedman. She should have been pleased to be noticed by me. And you be careful yourself. You'd better release me and punish your slaves who attacked me and tied me up or my patron will have something to say about it.' His mouth was twisted in his fury, he looked as though he might burst into weeping, he wrenched at his bonds, and nearly fell. The two Germans, who were standing behind, steadied him.

Metella took Pericles aside. 'I am going in to write letters to the Master and to Lucius Vitellius. You will provide two men to take them to Rome at once. When I have done with Thyrsus you will keep him tied up for the rest of the day and late to-night you will take him, as a prisoner, to Rome and hand him over to the Aediles. They will, by that time, have heard about him; but I will give you a letter to them in case they have not. Now call out all the household to hear what I have to say.' In a few moments, all except the labourers in the fields were in the yard, and even some of the labourers seemed to have heard the news and were soon on the scene. ~~When they had gathered,~~ Metella, who had been walking slowly up and down, faced Thyrsus again, and said — 'You attacked this girl who belongs to your late Master. You did not spare her although she is a slave as you were, and as you had been for years, until just now. You should have spared her not although, but because, she is a slave, because she is unfortunate as you were, helpless as you were, a piece of property to be bought and sold, as you were. But you had no mercy on

her. If you had done to her what you intended I would have crucified you. You can thank the gods and Pericles that you failed in your intention. If you have anything to say, say it, for I am going to have you flogged.'

An excited tremor ran through the little crowd. Thyrsus, himself, for a second was incredulous; then, 'You'll pay for this,' he shouted, 'all of you! You can't do it. You daren't do it, I tell you.' He looked round as though for some way of escape.

Metella said to Pericles, 'Take that ring from his finger and give it to me.' The Germans held him tight and thrust his hand forward. Pericles took the gold ring. Metella held it up, saying, 'The Knight's ring! I warned him in Rome not to wear it'. Then she said, 'Tie him to that wheel,' pointing to a farm-cart that stood in the yard. Thyrsus flung himself on the ground, but they dragged him to the wheel, tied him to it and stripped his back. Metella said to Pericles, 'Are you willing to do it?' and he answered 'Yes, madam, it had better be me than anyone else'. She nodded, said, 'Twenty strokes,' and walked away to the house. She called Iris to come with her but the girl did not move. She called again, but Iris shook her head and moved forward towards the cart. Thyrsus, turning his head, saw her eyes fixed on him, her face untriumphant but merciless. Pericles, who was now standing ready with a leathern thong in his hand, feared that she was coming too near and shouted to her to stop where she was. She stopped and stood there, watching steadily till it was all over. Then she walked quietly to the house, the other slaves chattering in low voices but not speaking to her, while the Germans led Thyrsus away to one of the barns and Pericles went within to receive his mistress's final instructions about the letters to Lucius Paetus and their friend Vitellius.

About dawn Pericles arrived with Thyrsus at the office of the police Aediles in Rome. He found Lucius there. Lucius had already made a report to the Aediles and had produced a letter from Vitellius commending him and Metella to their attention, and presently they were all summoned to the presence of one of the Aediles. He was a smooth-spoken man, of a deceptive mildness. He said to Thyrsus without severity — 'You are charged with assaulting a slave of Publius Antonius, whose slave you yourself were formerly.'

Thyrsus shook his head. 'I am a freedman — I was freed by Aulus Cornelius Rufus, the son of Sextus Cornelius Flaccus. I have been twice assaulted, thrown down — beaten — by the order of Publius's daughter, Metella' — he pointed to Lucius — 'his wife.'

The Aedile remarked thoughtfully, 'Sextus Cornelius is relegated to Patmos, and Aulus Cornelius to Cyprus for joining in the treason of Aelius Sejanus. You take advantage, perhaps, of their absence?'

Thyrsus said nothing. The Aedile picked up a gold ring from the table in front of him and, holding it up, said to Thyrsus, 'Is this yours?'

When Thyrsus hesitated, the Aedile said pleasantly, 'There are witnesses.'

'Yes,' Thyrsus said. 'It is mine. It was stolen from me this morning when I was beaten. It was taken by force.'

'It is the gold ring of the Knights. You are a Knight?'

'I am.'

The Aedile smiled. 'Since when?'

'Since February of this year. The Governor of Asia conferred the ring on me at Caesar's order, for services to the State.'

'When were you made a freedman?'

'At the end of October, twelve months ago.'

'And by February you had done such services to the State that you were made a Knight. That is admirable. You have the financial qualifications of a Knight?'

'No, not yet.'

'Your services must have been great.' The Aedile could not have been gentler. 'Now will you kindly produce the papers proving what you have said?'

'I cannot produce them. They are at Cyprus. They are in the hands of my patron, Aulus Cornelius.'

The Aedile was grieved. 'A lately freed slave who, without proper qualifications, is so lucky as to be made a Knight in a few months' time is imprudent if he does not carry with him the proof of such remarkable promotion. I am afraid that a serious view is taken by the Emperor of freedmen who pose as Knights and cannot prove it. It may be necessary to proceed against you as an impostor.'

'I am not an impostor.' Thyrsus broke out violently. 'And you cannot prove it.'

The Aedile shrugged. 'It is not for us to prove it, but for you to prove that you have the right to the ring. And I'm afraid that if you can't —' he turned his thumbs upwards, raising his eyebrows as though he were shocked at the prospect.

'I know why you are doing this,' said Thyrsus. 'You can't fool me. You think you'll stop my mouth about the assault made on a freedman by a vile slave at the order of his mistress. I'll show you.' He raised his voice defiantly.

The Aedile, unmoved, put his finger-tips together and leaned forward. 'You are charged with usurping the style of a Knight, for which you could be imprisoned or sold for a slave or even executed, as Caesar might direct. But I do not want to be hard on you. It may be that you have evidence, though I greatly doubt it. You will, therefore, return to Asia, or to Cyprus, to collect it and if you bring it back to Rome, and produce it here, we shall, of course, return your ring. But in the meantime we shall keep it safely here, together with a record of the evidence against you, and if you should come before us again and not have the necessary evidence, it would be very unfortunate for you. There is a ship leaving Ostia to-morrow, if the wind is right, for Alexandria. We will make arrangements for you to travel by it and you will remain a prisoner until you go on board. You can arrange for your belongings to be taken to the boat.'

'And if I won't go?' asked Thyrsus.

'You will have to justify this at once.' The Aedile smiled almost affectionately, fingering the ring. 'I am sure you will decide to go.' He nodded to the attendants, who led Thyrsus away.

'A truculent fellow,' said the Aedile to Lucius, '~~but we could have broken him over that ring, and he knew it.~~ There are a lot of rascally freedmen doing the same thing. They are no more Knights than this fellow, and some day there is going to be a massacre of them. Well, I trust you're safely rid of him for a good many months. We'll keep the evidence in case he gives more trouble. What's his history? You don't know much about him? I'm not surprised. There's no end to this freedman riff-raff nowadays, and no one knows where they spring from. Some are

good, of course, and many clever, but a lot of them are scum. No, don't thank me. I'm delighted to have been of use to you and your wife and Lucius Vitellius. He's likely to be Consul the year after next, I hear. I'm glad to oblige him. We'll see this fellow safely off to Alexandria. He won't be able to come back by sea during the winter and I don't suppose he'll travel all the way round by land, so tell your wife not to worry. When does the child arrive? About March? My best wishes to you, and present them to your wife.'

Thysus was taken on board the ship at Ostia the next day and forty-eight hours later he left for Alexandria.

CHAPTER V

THE child was born early in March. To the general delight it was a boy. Metella, as soon as she was told, discovered that she would have been bitterly disappointed had it been a girl. Lucius backed her up declaring that he had always known that her desire for a girl had been feigned just to tease him. Soon after Thysus had left Ostia they had come back to Rome for the birth and, at the beginning of the new year, Publius and Caecilia had joined them. Publius reported that he had been making such good progress with the Greek and Punic writers on agriculture that he was hoping to take up field-labour again in the spring. Caecilia said, 'Which spring?' She told Metella that actually Publius spent most of his time reading, not agriculture but his old favourites, and that he wasted the time of the farm servants by trying to discover among them, much to their bewilderment, a second Pericles.

The whole family gathered round to consider whom the baby was like. Metella said he was like Lucius, especially in the shape of the head. Lucius himself acknowledged this but insisted there were strong suggestions of Metella in the mouth and nose. Caecilia said the child was the image of Metella, and Iris agreed with this though it was just possible that there was a slight resemblance, perhaps in the mouth, to Lucius. Publius laughed at such empty pretensions; the child clearly resembled him, he said,

especially in the back of the head, which indicated mental power, and in the mouth, whose shape suggested the gift of oratory. After argument Publius said to Pericles, 'You don't usually say nothing. What do you think about it?'

'What's the use of asking him?' said Caecilia. 'I don't suppose he's ever seen a baby close before.'

'He saw all those children that his uncle had,' objected Publius. 'Were they like their father, Pericles?'

'I could hardly say, sir. I was forbidden to take notice of them. But I know that whereas my great-uncle certainly thought they were his children, my mother sometimes declared that they resembled not him but certain much respected citizens of the town whom she did not even hesitate to name. I think that perhaps emotion warped her judgment. It often does, sir.'

'And not hers only,' said Publius, 'if I remember correctly the story of the disappointed mothers. Their judgment, too, was bad.'

'Passion distorts the reason, I think, sir. You will remember how Paris and the unhappy Helen . . .'

Caecilia interrupted firmly. 'No, no, you don't, Pericles. We know quite well ourselves what passion does without your bringing in that woman Helen.'

Pericles was contrite. 'Yes, madam, I am sorry: it is a weakness of mine. My mind runs to these allusions.'

'You must discipline yourself,' said Publius. 'Reflect. Practise self-restraint.'

'Yes, sir, I must. I will not say another word. As Aeschylus says, a great ox stands upon my tongue.'

Publius was extraordinarily excited. 'But what a splendid phrase, Pericles! It's a popular saying, of course, but how do such sayings arise? That's what puzzles me; I've always wondered. They must have had an origin some time, but when, how and with whom did they start? But we'd better go out into the garden, Pericles, to talk about it, or we shall get into trouble with these women here. You see, here is a sentence, a common saying that was used all over Greece, and, I suppose, wherever Greek was spoken, and at some remote day it must have been used for the first time on earth by one particular person. Perhaps it was said by a peasant with a big ox in front of him? Or perhaps by a

chief like Nestor, the king of sandy Pylos, whose words would be picked up and spread all over the country?"

Pericles was not less stirred than his master. His eyes sparkled. 'Or it might, sir, have been someone like the bandy-legged, ill-favoured Thersites, who was always saying things to make the Greeks laugh? Then, after Troy fell, they would disperse to their homes all round the Aegean, and when a man was silent they would say, "Oho! he's got a great ox standing on his tongue, as Thersites used to say".'

Caecilia spoke firmly. 'Publius, my dear, did you say that you were going into the garden? Because we want to discuss the baby's name — without you.'

'If only these women,' said Publius as he went out of doors with Pericles, 'would agree that the child is like me, which I take to be incontestable . . .'

'Or perhaps, sir, that it isn't like anyone at all.'

'Hush, my dear man!' Publius looked round anxiously. 'Hush! If you are overheard saying such things, you are lost. There are some things that must not be even breathed, at times like these, however true. You are right, quite right, but you must pretend. For once sacrifice principle. I assure you it is necessary. And try not to say "it". They can't forgive "it". Always say "he" or "she". Also they expect you to get the sex right, even if you don't know. But now about these popular sayings. Out here we can open our mouths again. I would give much to know just who it was, five hundred or a thousand years ago, who first said, when he meant that he would be silent, that "a great ox stood on his tongue", so that the words spread from one village to another, and from one town to another, until the whole people were using them. And when you think that there are hundreds of sayings like this one, and that every one of them started in the far away past with some one person of real flesh and blood, why, it's a most remarkably exciting world we live in, Pericles. I could give you lots of instances. Who was it, I wonder, that first said "Know thyself", that magnificent maxim which I myself conscientiously obey. I try to realize my weaknesses as well as my strength, Pericles. No illusions about oneself — that's my maxim! I hope you do the same.'

'I try, sir.'

'I know you do, and I fully expect that in time you'll be as successful as I am. Pericles, do you remember what Alexander the Great said of Diogenes?'

'Yes, sir, that if he were not Alexander he would desire to be Diogenes.'

'And if I were not Publius Antonius, the Senator, I would like to be Pericles, his slave.'

'That is indeed good of you, sir, considering the difference in our condition.'

'Ah, Pericles, but that difference must not continue. I am ashamed of it and I must take steps to alter it. You shall be free.'

'Thank you, sir, I shall be very proud.'

'I ought to have seen to it long ago. But, Pericles, did you notice how anxious the Mistress was to get rid of us? What are they going to call that baby?'

'I would suppose, sir, that they will call him after the person he so incontestably resembles.'

This, in fact, they did, and to the joy of the grandfather the child was known thereafter as 'Young Publius'. Publius became more and more convinced that the child would be an orator. When he crowed, Publius said that he had a bell-like intonation; when he dribbled, that he would never spoil a speech by being husky; when, a little later, his face was suddenly creased in an engaging smile, that he would establish with his audience that spiritual sympathy which distinguished the supreme orator, the Demosthenes, the Hortensius and the Cicero, from those who were only very good.

Once or twice, when Metella regarded the child, a spasm of fear invaded her; he was so lovely and so helpless. When she told Lucius he put his arm round her and said, 'You are like a soldier before battle, my sweet; you are afraid that you are afraid, but that will all vanish at the first sign that this precious infant is in danger. You would have fought like a she-wolf before he was born and now you will fight like a tigress, with him as well as me to fight for. I know you. It is not in you to be afraid of anything or anybody.'

'No, I'm not afraid — except, it may be, of myself! You know, if Thyrus had done that to Iris, I would really have killed him. I meant it. But you should have seen his face, Lucius, when I

told him he was to be flogged. He meant murder then, had he been free.'

'Oh, no doubt, if he could get one of us anywhere alone, and was certain of escape himself. But we needn't let that happen. I think he's more likely to inspire his patron and his patron's friends against us.'

'Lucius, a thing like that — what he wanted to do and tried to do to Iris — couldn't stand alone, could it? I mean that if he would do violence like that he would do any violence, wouldn't he? If he had that thought, he must have had other horrible thoughts, mustn't he? His mind must have been full of evil all these years, and now it's bursting out when he's safe and prosperous and insolent and thinks he has the power.'

'I don't think he'll attack us openly. We'll keep a watch for him, especially where Iris is concerned.'

'Iris? I think she's almost hoping that he will come back. She goes about cheerfully reciting passages from her Jewish sacred books about what happens to the wicked and she tells me what they mean. They're frightful. They're blood-curdling. She means as much harm to the terrible Thyrsus as ever he meant to her. But I hope he won't come back for a long, long time, so that everyone will have forgotten whatever it is they've heard about the business.'

They had heard a good deal. Thyrsus himself had had no chance to spread his version, but the people at the farm and Vitellius and the Aedile talked. Some of those who heard got the story right, but others only knew, or at any rate only said, that the freedman had come on a mission from Metella's former suitor, whereupon she had flown into a rage — everyone knew, they said, that she had always been hot-tempered — and had him flogged. Valeria, when she passed on this story, added her version of the offence which Metella had given to Gaius at Surrentum. Then the trouble was because of a drunken poet plotting treason; now, she said, it was for the sake of a slave girl about whom Metella had lost her balance once before. It was a great pity when a girl from one of the best families in Rome, on whom lay a responsibility to set a good example, displayed this mawkish softness about slaves. The parents were to blame; everyone knew that they spoilt their slaves, and Publius treated Pericles, a book-

worm like himself, as though he were an equal. Her husband, Marcus, she said, held strong views about this sort of thing. He believed that there were too many slaves and too many freedmen; he thought that the number of slaves should be diminished; the proportion to be freed should be severely limited, and an occasional sound flogging was good for any of them. There was evidence that other members of the Cornelian House, kinsmen of Aulus and his father, were turning the assault on Thyrsus to such account as they could, but so long as Tiberius was alive the partisans of Sejanus found it hard to get a hearing. Nevertheless Lucius and Metella were by no means sorry when, in the summer of this year, a letter came from Thrasyllus, at Capreae, renewing his suggestion that Lucius might use the knowledge which he had gained in his Department and obtain a post in the East under the Government. The Emperor, wrote Thrasyllus, had just decided that one of the Consuls for the next year should be Lucius Vitellius; it was already settled that after his year of office Vitellius would be sent out to be Governor of Syria, the heart of Rome's Eastern Empire, the barrier against the enemies who might threaten it from the deserts and the region of the great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. Thrasyllus suggested that Lucius should seek to be appointed assistant to one of the Quaestors who would be serving under Vitellius during his year of office in Rome and that, after thus gaining experience, he should accompany the new proconsul to Syria as a member of his staff. He was confident that his own influence, and that of Publius, would secure all this; in fact he would not now suggest it to Lucius had he not already sounded Vitellius and made sure that he was willing. If Publius would put in his word, all would be well. Publius, who was again at Comum, was delighted. He wrote that he had immediately sent off a letter to Vitellius. Since he was just celebrating his own birthday, he had suggested to Vitellius that he should display his interest in Lucius (and Metella) as a birthday present to his old friend. He was sure Vitellius would agree; he would let them know as soon as he heard, though probably they would hear from Vitellius himself.

At the same time Publius said he must tell them of the little trick that Caecilia had played him on his birthday. She had given him a parcel of books which she knew to be his favourites.

She had also given him a big bulky package which he could not make out at all. When he unwrapped it he found that it contained a spade, pitchfork, ox-goad and hoe, together with a neatly written motto which ran:

'Think it not shame sometimes to grasp the hoe or to reproach slow oxen with the goad.'

'The cunning of the woman!' wrote Publius. 'She had slipped into my study when I was out, found a Tibullus lying open, and copied out this passage. I said to your mother, "If one instruction is good for me, why not another? What about 'Now is lighthearted love to be pursued!' in the same poem?" And all she did was to laugh and say "You and lighthearted love! I'd like to see you sitting at the stubborn doors of any smart young Delia." (So she had read the whole poem!) "You're better off with your plain Caecilia," she said, "and well you know it." As well I do.'

So Lucius became assistant to one of the Quaestors and by the middle of the next year, 34 in the Christian reckoning, Vitellius had appointed him a member of the staff which he was going to take with him to his province of Syria. It was arranged that the Young Publius, now nearly eighteen months old, should go, too, with Iris to help his mother in looking after him. Old Publius insisted, as before, that Pericles should attend Lucius. First, he said, this was necessary to maintain the dignity of the family; secondly, Lucius and Metella needed someone sophisticated to look after them; thirdly, Pericles would be a constant refreshment not only to them but also, he was sure, to Vitellius and his staff; fourthly, as the infant Publius was still a little too young to benefit by the famous rhetoricians of the East, Pericles would meet them and garner their wisdom for the benefit of the child a little later. Lucius argued that Pericles was needed, most of all, by Publius himself, but it was soon clear that Publius was relying on Pericles, in whom alone he had full confidence, to bring them all safely home again.

During all these months they had seen nothing of Thyrsus. They had, however, heard more than once that he was in Rome and it seemed likely, from their slaves' reports, that he busied himself collecting careful information about their doings and plans and those also of Publius and Caecilia. In August they

set out for Alexandria, whence in the late autumn they were to make their way to Antioch, the capital of Syria, there to join Vitellius.

Publius had insisted that they must on no account fail to visit Alexandria. He himself had never been there nor, since he was a Senator, was he likely ever to see it, for the Emperors jealously guarded Egypt as their own stronghold and would let no Senator set foot there. Now, said Publius, since Lucius would certainly, before long, become a Senator, he must take Metella with him, while he could, to see Alexandria — the second city of the world, the greatest port, the busiest trading centre, the garden of Hellenic culture, the place where the lordship of Rome had been lost and won during the civil wars, the bewildering, bustling capital in which three great communities lived side by side: the Egyptians, their Greek conquerors and the Jews, all of them ruled by the Romans. Besides, there was no place in the world so full of mysteries as Egypt. He would like, Publius said, to suggest a little holiday task for Lucius. Let him discover the sources of the Nile: that problem which the wise men of many centuries had failed to solve. 'You know,' he wrote, 'there is a story that in the most distant part of Egypt there is a fountain, unfathomable in depth, and that out of it one part of the Nile runs to the south and the other to the north. I cannot believe this to be true because it is known that as you go up the Nile the land rises so that boats have to be dragged up the stream; how, then, can the current change and flow towards the north? There, my dear boy, is a puzzle for you to solve, and if you solve it you will be wiser than the wisest man who ever lived — king Nestor of sandy Pylos.'

'Even with the aid of Pericles,' said Lucius grimly, 'I can hardly in six weeks discover the sources of the Nile.'

Iris told Pericles she was surprised at Publius. 'Really,' she said, 'the old master ought to know better. The wisest man who ever lived was King Solomon, who was wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, so that his fame was everywhere. Why, he spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs were a thousand and five.'

'And then,' Publius went on, 'if you've the time, there are some smaller things I'd like to know about. Is it true that there

is a race of dwarfs in Africa, little men, half our size? Is it true that the Nile brings such fertility to the farmers that they wait until it has first flooded their fields and then withdrawn into its bed, after which they simply scatter the seed and send in their pigs to tread it in? And, talking of pigs, is it true that if an Egyptian so much as touches a pig in passing he hurries to the river and plunges in with all his clothes on to avert the uncleanness? I told Lollia I was asking you about this custom, and she gave her loud, hoarse laugh. "Tell him from me," she said, "to do in Egypt as the Egyptians do." She gleefully imagined a pig brushing against you in the street, and you hurrying to throw yourself, toga and all, into the Nile. A dear, malicious woman!"

The voyage began at Puteoli near Naples. The ship was of six hundred tons, with a crew of one hundred and twenty, and it carried nearly seven hundred passengers. Most of them were for Egypt and beyond, a few for destinations on the way—Messina and Rhegium, Tarentum, Malta and Crete. The ship unloaded and took on cargo when it stopped. As they left Puteoli they saw Capreae lying ahead; they sailed a mile or two to the right of it. Metella told Iris to hold Young Publius up so that he could say in the future that he had seen the famous island when the Emperor Tiberius was there, 'and I hope,' she whispered to the child, 'that that's as near as you ever get to seeing him'. She looked at the island, and shivered. 'I wonder whether he'll still be alive when we come back,' she said to Lucius, who replied thoughtfully, 'Meaning Tiberius? I hope he will. I dislike the known, but the unknown I fear.' Then, as they passed the western side of the island, Metella cried out and pointed. On the top of the cliff were standing two gigantic figures, one of them heavy, threatening, the other thinner, though as tall and statuesque. Metella cried out 'Look! Look! Tiberius and Gaius, watching on the cliffs!' She turned hastily towards Iris, saying, 'Give me the child, we'll go below until we're past.' Iris, looking keenly ashore, said, 'I think they're only rocks,' and Lucius pointed out that, as the ship moved on, the sun plainly exposed the figures as two great upstanding rocks, perhaps thirty or forty feet high, on the cliff tops. 'Not that they are so very unlike men,' said Lucius, 'and certainly if they were men, monstrous and implacable.' 'We'll go below all the same,' said Metella. 'We don't

want to run across Gaius racing about in his little boat and be invited to pay the visit that we never paid before, or perhaps commanded to go there in the name of the Emperor.' She and Iris took Young Publius below and did not come up again till they arrived at Messina.

They took nearly three weeks to get to Alexandria. The north-west wind was blowing them on and a fortnight would have been enough but for the number of calls they made and the amount of cargo that they dealt with. At last they had left Crete and everyone was looking forward to Egypt and Alexandria and his destination. Among the passengers were officers of the Roman garrison in Egypt, Knights who held high administrative posts, officials of the corn supply, traders, freedmen, a few of them going out for the first time, but most of them returning from business or leave. There was a group of them round Metella, who had asked the old-stagers what impressed them most about Egypt.

'The mob!' said a military officer.

'Which mob?' asked a young colleague of his, a newcomer. 'There are Greeks and Jews, aren't there?'

'And Egyptians,' replied the other. 'I mean all of them. In general, and in particular, they're violent and bloodthirsty.'

'They only riot sometimes.' A hard-bitten old official was rather scornful. 'You get used to it, but not to the sand and flies which are there always.'

'I don't mind their being bloodthirsty,' said a young exquisite, another soldier. 'We can repay that with interest. What I can't endure is their insolence. They treat us Romans as though we were aliens, and when we do have to meet them they expect to be treated by us as equals.'

'Do you mean the Greeks, or the Jews, or the Egyptians?' asked Metella politely.

'I have no idea which they are. They all seem pretty much the same to me. The Greeks are not bad, but they're not Roman. They do things that aren't done. I sometimes think there's not much to choose between them and the Jews.'

'Can't anyone tell us something pleasant about the place?' inquired Lucius, 'after all we've heard?'

'Yes, indeed,' said a Knight who was in trade and had with

him several freedmen and a score of slaves. 'I won't hear it run down. You'll find not only Greeks and Egyptians and Jews in Alexandria but men from all the world, together with their ships and goods. It has the mightiest river, the finest buildings, the greatest library, the most magnificent street. Its learning, its medicine, its magic and its theatres are beyond compare. There is every kind of work, and work for all. And if we Romans cannot appreciate all that, let us thank God for the plentiful supplies of water. What makes a city great? A noble water-supply. Which cities supply water to almost every house? Rome, Alexandria, Antioch. Which are admittedly the three great cities of our time? Rome, Alexandria, Antioch.'

'Why,' said Metella delightedly, 'the one we have left and the two we are going to visit!' Presently, when the group dispersed, Metella told Pericles and Iris what had been said about the wonders of Alexandria. Lucius said to Pericles, 'What would you say, who know Alexandria so well? What do you most remember it for? The Museum of the philosophers, I suppose, where you spent so many happy hours?'

'No, sir,' Pericles was very serious. 'Not the Museum! But there was close to it a little tavern where they cooked wild duck caught on the marshes of the Nile Delta. I assure you that with Chian wine it was the most wonderful thing in Alexandria or in Egypt.'

'You surprise me, Pericles,' said Metella. 'I did not dream that you had thoughts of duck. My father would be grieved.'

'On the contrary, madam, when I told him, he said he wished he could get rid of his Senatorial rank in order to go at once to Alexandria. Also, although I liked the wild duck, I would wish to say that I always thought well of the Pyramids.'

'He is making fun of me, Lucius,' protested Metella. 'I shall appeal to Iris. When I think of Alexandria I think of the man after whom it was called — Alexander the Conqueror — what do you say, Iris?'

'Who was Alexander, madam? The greatest conqueror was King David. He conquered Edom and Moab, madam, and also Hadadezer, son of Rehob, King of Zobah.'

'At any rate, Iris, you know of Alexandria by the Nile, the greatest, longest river.'

'The greatest river, madam, and the biggest, broadest, longest is the Jordan. When a great captain dipped in it seven times he ceased to be a leper, and I never heard that the Nile did that for anyone.'

They entered the eastern of the two harbours at Alexandria early one evening. The ship cast anchor till the next morning, when they were to be told at what point along the quays they were to berth. They stood, with many other passengers, gazing at the scene. To their right was the famous lighthouse, the Pharos, and beyond it the mole, several miles long, that ran out from the city, dividing the bay into two parts. Shipping filled the port and crowded the quays. On the waterfront were tall warehouses. Behind rose palaces, temples, mausoleums. On the left was the quarter where the Jews lived; in the centre were the Greeks, to the right the Egyptians, in all about a million people.

'Why do the Caesars keep Egypt to themselves?' asked Metella.

'Because,' said Lucius, 'for nearly twenty years Egypt was the greatest danger to them. Rome's enemies made Egypt the instrument of their ambition. Cleopatra, Rome's rival, was its queen.'

Pericles pointed into the haze away to the left. 'Somewhere over there Pompey the Great was stabbed to death by one of his own officers when about to land in Egypt after Julius Caesar had beaten him at Pharsalus. And there' — he indicated a peninsula sticking straight out towards them from the land — 'is the place where Mark Antony took refuge when he fled back to Egypt and his wife Cleopatra after Augustus had crushed him in the sea battle of Actium.'

'Was he murdered like Pompey?' asked Metella.

'No.' Lucius gave the answer. 'He stabbed himself when he thought that Cleopatra had taken her own life. He died' — Lucius shrugged his shoulders with contempt — 'in the Egyptian woman's arms.'

'And why not?' said Metella, 'if he loved her? She made everyone love her, didn't she? I wish I'd seen her. She must have been wonderful. Wasn't Julius Caesar her lover? And what about Augustus?'

Lucius smiled. 'No, not Augustus. That great statesman did not let women interfere with his plans, nor value conquests of

them. Pericles, tell them what Augustus did with Cleopatra.'

'At any rate he didn't execute her,' said Metella, 'nor exhibit her in his triumph at Rome.'

'No, madam, he took her treasure and her kingdom, and he spoke with her alone in such a way, though no one knows what he said, that thereafter she took her own life with the asp. Augustus killed her son by Julius Caesar, as he did also Mark Antony's son by a Roman wife, both boys then in Egypt, lest they should ever threaten his power. Those were bad days for Egypt.'

'They seem to have been bad days for a good many Romans, too,' said Metella.

'They might have been worse, madam.' Pericles pointed to the waters not far ahead of the boat. 'That is the spot where the great Julius, when his ship sank under him during the revolt, had to swim for his life. But he had a strong heart, had Julius, in more senses than one, and he won through.'

'I had not realized,' said Lucius, 'what violent catastrophes of fortune Alexandria had meant until I saw the city. Pompey, so long the arbiter of Rome, murdered at its gates; Mark Antony, lord of the East, dispenser of thrones, the man who held a Roman triumph in a foreign city' — again a scornful gesture — 'driven to ignominious suicide; Cleopatra, the great Queen, mother of Julius Caesar's child and of Mark Antony's children, rival of Great Rome, ruined, abased and made to kill herself. Julius Caesar himself, dictator and founder of a Roman dynasty, almost snuffed out like a common soldier in the harbour. A fatal City!'

'You remember who was its founder, sir?'

'You mean Alexander, Pericles?'

'Yes, sir, he was not yet thirty years of age when he, the world conqueror, was brought back dead from Babylon to rest here in his own city.' He pointed to a building whose roof showed on the right hand side of the city. 'His mausoleum!'

Lucius nodded. 'The thread is spun for us. All that we can do is to live and die good Romans.' He smiled at Pericles. 'I include you in that, of course.' He fell into thought until he felt Metella's hand on his and saw her eyes fixed on him.

'Lucius, I'll wager five kisses I know what you are thinking.'

'Taken! What then?'

'You were thinking that a man should do his best for Rome, not for himself, should stick to the old Roman Gods of the home, the fields and crops, and should live and die for his adorable wife and still more adorable young Publius.'

'Correct, except for the comparison!' and Lucius kissed her five times in front of the officers, Knights, merchants, and crew, each of whom wished he himself had married her.

Having landed, they went to the house of Strabo, a Knight, a friend of Publius, who was concerned both with the transport of grain for Rome and with many Egyptian commercial ventures. He had his headquarters in Alexandria, offices at Puteoli and Ostia, agents in Syria and Arabia, scouts in Parthia and India. Alexandria, he told them, was not wholly placid. 'At the moment there is a disturbance every other day, a riot one day in ten, and a pitched battle once a month.'

'But what about the Roman peace?' protested Lucius.

'And the Roman legions?' asked Metella.

Their host smiled at them. 'The legions ignore the disturbances, tolerate the riots and finally, if they must, win the pitched battles. It is not good for the legions to be in a city like this. They are spoilt. Everywhere there are frivolities, money, women, especially women. Greek girls, dashing and seductive; Jewesses, bold and flaunting; Egyptian women, grave and passionate.'

Metella laughed. 'All women are passionate, only some conceal it better than others.'

'They don't in Alexandria,' said Strabo.

'Nor in Rome,' interjected Lucius.

Metella addressed Strabo gravely. 'You see, my husband is so liable to passionate women.' She pinched Lucius's ear until he squealed.

'I am sure,' said Strabo, 'that Lucius repels every assault with indignation.'

'He's never known what it is to have one, except from me.'

'One of the clamour girls!' said Lucius, nodding at Metella.

'At any rate,' said Strabo, 'there's no doubt about the Alexandrian women. The legionary camps are perpetually besieged. Girls of sixteen and seventeen, you know, they're the worst. Parents have no control nowadays; that's the trouble. Our Generals don't know what to do about it, but the legions really

ought to be sent to one of the fighting frontiers after six months here or they become soft and enervated.'

'But what do the citizens riot about?' asked Metella.

'About anything,' said Strabo, 'or about nothing if things have been rather quiet. The Egyptians, you know, are a conquered people — first by the Greeks, then by the Romans. They are proud and vindictive, they live in the past, they are cruel, they like a bit of bloodshed.'

'They ought to get on with the Romans then,' said Metella.

'The Greeks look down on them,' went on Strabo, 'as they on the Greeks, while the Jews despise them both. The Greeks and the Jews quarrel with one another in order not to quarrel among themselves, being the most factious of all peoples. When there is only domestic faction — fighting going on in either the Jewish or the Greek quarter — the city is peaceful. And sometimes they are all united in deriding, or attacking, the Romans and the Emperor.'

'Why,' said Lucius, rather shocked, 'don't they respect the Emperor?'

Strabo laughed out loud. 'They respect nothing, nothing at all. Don't you know what is said to be the difference between the people of Alexandria and the people of Antioch? They both of them shout insults at their rulers, but at Antioch they shout and run, while at Alexandria they shout and stand their ground. You'll soon discover how they respect the Divine Emperors.'

They did, in fact, soon discover it. On going to some Games that were being exhibited at a festival they were, at first, amused by the lively, shouting, singing, quarrelsome crowd. Then they saw, with astonishment, how the mob turned to ridiculing the Roman officials and soldiers who were present, with rude gestures and snatches of doggerel. One chorus was a great favourite, the mob shouting it over and over again. Lucius could not fully understand it, though the insinuation was clear, but Strabo explained it to him. The priests of Isis had, long ago, in their official rescripts, applied to Augustus, the new ruler, the term 'beautiful boy' and 'lovely boy' which had always been ceremonially used of the boy-kings of Egypt. About this time they had used the same purely official terms about the present ruler, Tiberius, seventy-five years old though he might be, and blotchy-

faced. This had tickled the sardonic mind of the Alexandrians so that 'beautiful boy' figured in many a gross jest against the Emperor. On top of this came wild stories from Capreae about the Emperor's licentiousness. The result was that on the day when Lucius and Metella were at the Games many thousands were gleefully chanting —

'Beautiful Boy! Lovely Boy!

Ah, Ah, Tiberius.

Beautiful boys! Lovely boys!

Oh, Oh, Tiberius!'

'Any other ruler but a Roman,' observed Strabo, 'would turn his guards loose and cut them down. But Caesar knows what can be suffered and what not, and thereby holds an Empire which severity might lose. Let them use their tongues freely, is his motto, provided they don't use their hands. But you must be wary in Alexandria. We Romans are not liked.'

About a week later, in the evening, after dark, a messenger called at Strabo's house asking to see Lucius. He presented a sealed letter. Lucius found that it was from the Prefect of the City, the Roman Governor, who asked him to go at once to the Palace. An important message from Vitellius, relating to Lucius's future duties in Syria, had just come; it might mean his immediate departure from Alexandria. Lucius was not surprised. He had been instructed that before he went to Antioch he was to visit Damascus. That city was the post from which the Roman Government, with its headquarters at Antioch, kept watch on what was happening in Judaea, and latterly reports reaching Rome through Damascus had said that the Procurator, Pontius Pilate, was not maintaining those smooth relations with the Jews which the imperial policy demanded. Lucius was to accumulate information and report to Vitellius at Antioch. He thought it possible that Vitellius might now be sending further instructions, so he at once prepared to start. The messenger said that he would go ahead with the news that Lucius was coming.

'You will take Pericles with you?' Metella urged. 'It's dark, it's a mile to the Palace, and there are unpleasant streets to go through.'

Lucius agreed to this, though reluctantly, but he refused to

listen when Pericles, remarking that he knew Alexandria, said that they ought to take two of Strabo's slaves to escort Lucius.

'I'm not Mark Antony, and I don't look like a millionaire. If there's any danger, and I'm sure there isn't, I should be much safer by myself. I can't do with two slaves besides Pericles.'

'No indeed!' Strabo, who had come in and was listening, intervened. 'You're going to have four. If you and Pericles carry arms, with six in all you should be safe. This is a port, you know, which means a lot of riff-raff; there are rebels and conspirators hidden here from every country in Asia, and the Delta outside is full of honest cut-throats who steal at night into the city. So you will take four men — yes, and I'll come with you myself.'

In spite of Lucius's protests, Strabo, warmly thanked by Metella, went with them. In twenty minutes they reached the Palace. Lucius stated his business and for a few minutes they waited. Then a Greek secretary came. He was puzzled; he thought there must have been some mistake. Lucius produced the Prefect's letter.

'I'm afraid,' said the secretary, 'that someone's hoaxed you. The Prefect left this afternoon for Memphis up the Nile and will not be back for two days. This letter is a forgery, seal and all.' He looked thoughtful. 'Either a practical joke or a trap! You have been all right on the way here? I think you had better let us provide an escort for you on the way back.' He insisted on sending half a dozen guards. He thought that this young man must have had important commissions entrusted to him by the great Vitellius and that some rival wanted him out of the way.

'You have no enemies in the city?' he asked Lucius.

'I scarcely know a soul. Someone is playing a silly joke on me.' Strabo nodded, but he made the guard, now doubled, surround Lucius closely on the walk back. Nothing happened, they saw nothing suspicious, but Metella was sure that there had been a plot to waylay Lucius, and Strabo supported her.

Some days later, Lucius and Metella having gone on an excursion up the Nile, Pericles went to spend the afternoon with an old friend at the library of the Museum. They had been slaves together in the old days and the friend, having bought his freedom, had continued in the service of the library. Pericles, after

spending a happy couple of hours in talking and examining books, had bidden his friend 'Good-bye' and was descending the staircase to the ground floor. He was absent-minded; he was revisiting in imagination his favourite restaurant. He had decided that he had just time to go there if it still existed. Suddenly he was aware of someone behind him in a violent hurry, someone who, in his haste to get past, rudely jostled him so that he fell headlong down the stairs. He lay huddled up just inside the entrance door. Half-stunned, he was vaguely aware of a figure bending over him. Then, suddenly, there were the steps of someone coming through the door, the figure straightened, leapt aside and vanished. The newcomer, a fragile, ancient man with a white beard, was mystified. He peered anxiously at Pericles lying on the ground. 'Are you hurt?' he said as Pericles, shaken and bruised, began slowly to rise. 'Has your friend gone for help? Or perhaps' — he meditated a little, 'Yes, that seems more likely. Have you been quarrelling? He was in a great hurry — he dashed out as though he were pursued.'

'I fell downstairs. He knocked me down from behind, no doubt by accident.'

'Now I wonder about that.' The old man shook his head. 'Do you really think so? It is a question of evidence, isn't it? When I came in he was bending over you and I thought he was going to strike you. He had something in his raised hand, I don't know what, but I am sure of it. Then, when he saw me, he suddenly concealed his hand in his cloak and dashed for the door, almost upsetting me. I feel sure that he was evilly-disposed towards you.'

'What was he like?' asked Pericles, who was now leaning against the wall, but suddenly sat down on the steps, feeling faint.

'I don't know. I see very badly. When I came in he was stooping over you, and then suddenly he was erect and gone. But he had something in his hand and I think it was something offensive. Now I'm going to my class-room upstairs — I'm a Professor here — you may have heard of me, Demetrius — you'd better come with me in case your friend returns. He might, just to see how you were, you know.' The old man chuckled. 'I've come back for my sandals. I always take my sandals off when I lecture and put on slippers; then, at the end, I forget to put the sandals on again. Sometimes my students — they're students of

philosophy and so very mischievous — hide my sandals and I have great difficulty in finding them again. Sometimes I don't find them. I hope they haven't done it to-day, though, to tell you the truth, I enjoy trying to work out what new hiding-place they have discovered. You wouldn't believe what strange places they find. I like to show that I am a match for them in ingenuity.' He twinkled at Pericles, putting his arm around him to help him upstairs.

In the lecture-room Demetrius placed Pericles carefully in his own chair while he searched for his sandals. In vain he looked in every likely and unlikely hiding-place until at last he said, 'They've beaten me again. I expect it's that lad Damon. He's usually the ringleader.'

'Can't you expel him?' said Pericles sympathetically.

'Expel Damon!' cried the Professor. 'For a mere prank! Why, he's my best student in Aristotle and that means the best in Alexandria. Besides, I like this game. I know how to fox them, including my fine Damon. Oh, yes! I have in this room, hidden away, a spare pair of sandals. He slowly moved the desk at which he lectured and proudly showed to Pericles that the floor-boards had been cut so that a piece could be lifted up. 'In the hole underneath here I have put my spare pair. Look!' Lifting the board he displayed the cavity. It was empty. 'Well, the young rascals!' he said, with glee. 'They've taken the spare pair, too. Now I shall have to go home in my slippers. My sister — Melpomene — she keeps house for me — she's five years older than I am, but very active — will be cross. But first I'm going to see you home, you're not fit to go alone and that unpleasant friend of yours might turn up again.'

He rejected all protests. 'You think I'm too old, but I'm not. How old do you think I am?'

'About sixty?' said Pericles, praying the gods to forgive him.

'Eighty!' The Professor was delighted. 'And I have all my faculties except that I can't remember my sandals. I really don't know what Melpomene will say. You know what my students aim at is to leave me without any sandals at all, so that I'll have to go about all the time in slippers. They've nearly succeeded.' He shot a sudden, sharp glance at Pericles. 'Did you ever see Cleopatra?'

Pericles, taken aback, hurriedly said that he thought Cleopatra had died about thirty years before he was born. Demetrius swept on.

'You missed the greatest sight that eyes ever saw, young man. I saw her when I was a boy. I saw her when I was about twelve years old, here in Alexandria. I was one of the crowd, taken by my father to watch when Mark Antony celebrated his triumph. I saw the Queen seated high on a golden throne, like a goddess, while the little people went to and fro and bowed and scraped beneath her. I saw her again, a little later, when she and Antony sat on thrones with their three children also on thrones just below them, and Antony distributed the kingdoms of the East among the three, with Cleopatra and her son by the great Julius to be supreme over them. She looked what she wanted to be, and in pride and loveliness already was, Queen of the Earth.'

'Antony made a mess of things?' suggested Pericles.

'The fool-Roman!' said Demetrius. The words poured out of him. 'The easy-going, lovesick, witless fool! To call her Queen and Empress and then expect his stupid Roman yokels to fight to make her that. He was a good soldier; he should have destroyed Augustus, Roman against Roman, made himself Emperor and after that have sent for Cleopatra to reign with him in Rome. What a Queen! What an Empress! She was far more divine than any of your Augustuses. I saw her and I tell you that Imperial power was in her lips and eyes. What brilliance, what adventure, what life there would have been in Rome instead of the cold, implacable efficiency of Augustus and his Livia! And besides,' said the Professor, beaming on Pericles, 'I might, myself, have held a Chair of Philosophy at Rome.' He accompanied Pericles all the way to Strabo's house, disclaiming all thanks. As he was about to leave he said — 'I don't really know whether to buy some new sandals or to go home as I am. I think I will buy some new ones. After all, although, as my dear Aristotle says, a poor man cannot be magnificent, he can be respectable. Perhaps I'd better buy two pairs in case they hide one of them.' He looked immensely knowing.

'Or perhaps you should first take the advice of your sister?'

'Melpomene,' said the Professor, 'is not so tolerant as I am now that she is getting on in years. She would say "expel them until

they leave your sandals alone", and that might end in my having sandals but no students. A Professor of Philosophy can do without sandals but not without fellow-students to make him happy. My sister, Melpomene, I should tell you, sees only one side of every question and so she never has any doubt about what to do. It is most useful.'

'And you,' said Pericles courteously, 'see both sides?'

'Both sides, my dear sir? You should say "all sides", for every question has many sides and it is precisely this that makes it fascinating, though it does not help us to decide what we should do. However, it does not matter because' — his eyes were merry — 'the Master has written that the man who is great of soul never takes trifling mishaps to heart, so why should I worry if they took away even my slippers?'

'The Master has also written that the man who is great of soul does not seek help but gives it gladly to others and is kind towards the weak. I, sir, am a slave.' He bowed to Demetrius.

'Ah,' said Demetrius in great delight. 'You, too, know Aristotle? Then, to me, you are no slave. I am greatly honoured to have helped a fellow-student. And now I feel so lighthearted that I will certainly buy some sandals whatever Melpomene may say.' He walked off happily. When he had gone a little way he turned and called Pericles back. He laid his hand gravely on Pericles's arm. 'Two pairs!' he said, 'two pairs, my dear friend!' and departed, full of merriment.

A few days later Pericles was informed that a Greek gentleman had called at the house and was asking to see Lucius or Metella. The visitor had explained to Strabo's steward that he had been on intimate terms in Rome with the household of Publius Antonius, whose daughter, he was sure, would be very ready to receive him. He had information which was of importance to her and her husband. He gave his name as Parmenio. When Pericles brought the news to Lucius and Metella, they decided at once that they would receive the soothsayer. They could not well decide to do otherwise and they were both anxious to face him in order to discover what his intentions might be.

'What do you think he wants, Lucius?'

'I should say money, my dear. Two helpless young Romans with a baby in a foreign city, a scandal in the background, and an

offer from this rascal to keep his mouth shut for an adequate reward!’

‘Do you think his coming has anything to do with that forged invitation of yours from the Prefect and the attack on Pericles at the library?’

‘It might be. What enemies have we? Only Aulus, Thyrsus, and Parmenio, so far as I know. What do you think, Pericles?’

‘It looks like it, sir. Possibly Aulus has paid the soothsayer and Thyrsus to carry out some plans against you.’

‘And you, Pericles.’

‘And me, perhaps, madam. And these two are now going to demand money from you at the price of betraying their employer.’

‘After which,’ said Lucius, ‘they will betray us. Well, let’s have him in and mind we say nothing till he tells us what he’s after.’

Pericles admitted Parmenio, who bowed respectfully. He was plainly dressed in a long black gown, but he still wore on his breast the Croesus lion which was said to contain the text of the oracle given him by Apollo and he carried the same staff with the figure of Apollo at the end. Lucius pointed to a chair. Parmenio sat down and they waited. Iris slipped into the room, pretending that she had come to give something to her mistress and remained standing by Pericles.

‘I hope,’ said Parmenio, ‘that you will enjoy your stay here before you go on to Antioch. Vitellius is an able man. I think you will have an interesting experience.’

Lucius said nothing, but his look inquired of Metella how the soothsayer should be so well informed.

‘When I was in Rome,’ continued Parmenio, as he got no reply, ‘Publius Antonius kindly paid to me the fee which Aulus Cornelius had promised me. Now that Aulus has paid me I must fulfil my promise to return the money.’ He produced a bag of money, which he placed on the table.

‘Aulus had already paid you in Rome,’ said Metella indignantly.

‘You obtained from Publius Antonius,’ added Lucius, ‘twice what Aulus promised and had already paid you.’

‘Now that Aulus Cornelius has paid the fee,’ said Parmenio unabashed and as though they had not spoken, ‘I should be wretched if I were in debt to my good friend Publius. I am now

returning the precise sum that he paid me. I am under an obligation to him. I should inform you that I am now the priest and director of the Temple of Apollo near the Palace, close to the entrance into the Jewish quarter. There are few more important temples in Egypt; indeed I think I may say in Africa and Asia. One of the chief reasons which procured me this honour, a most sacred trust, was that I was known to have been consulted by the distinguished Senator Publius Antonius about the traitor Sejanus, whose conspiracy and fall with all his kin I truthfully foretold. I enjoy some reputation here on that account and I am grateful to my helper, Publius Antonius.'

'You foretold Sejanus's disgrace and death, did you say?' inquired Lucius.

'Yes,' said Parmenio, 'and thereby I gained the priesthood of Apollo. I think I may say that Publius Antonius even won some credit from being associated with my prophecy.'

'You brought credit to my father because you prophesied to him the fall of Sejanus? — is that what you are saying?' Metella almost choked but saw Lucius's warning glance.

'Yes, and because I am grateful to your father for helping to elevate me to my sacred seat I have come to-day to repay my debt in money, and also with a piece of news. There is the money' — he patted the bag — 'and my news is that the freedman Thyrsus is in Alexandria. He arrived a few days before you did, coming from Cyprus.'

They looked at each other, saying nothing.

'I thought you would like to know that.' Parmenio allowed a moment or two for his words to sink in. 'And perhaps to be prepared. I gather that he suffered a mischance when he visited your farm near Antium. Something a trifle humiliating, I believe.' There was a gleam in his eyes and the corners of his mouth dropped slightly as though, in imagination, he saw something that amused him. 'Your slave, Pericles, had a share in it, I think, and you, madam, gave the order. But, of course, Thyrsus might show his resentment, if he feels any, against others who were not directly responsible for his misfortune — you, Lucius Paetus, for instance. I don't know, but I thought that, at all events, whether it interests you or not, I would tell you that he is in Alexandria.'

'We are grateful,' said Metella, and Lucius confirmed her. 'We shall not forget it, and my father will be grateful, too. He was very angry with you.'

'I have always regretted it. I have never been easy in mind knowing that Publius Antonius was not wholly pleased with me. I feared that he might raise difficulties for me in Alexandria, just when I had been chosen for one of the most distinguished religious offices in this most religious land.'

'Religious?' Metella stared at him. 'Why, I thought there were constant riots here?'

'Yes, madam, but you must remember that most of them, certainly the worst, are religious riots.'

'Why,' said Lucius, 'we have been told that many of these disorders are accompanied by fierce bloodshed.'

'And is it not, my dear sir, a glorious thing when a man will shed blood, both that of others and his own, for the sake of religion? Especially in a country where life is so highly valued? And here, in this happy land, there are not one but three religions whose worshippers will kill and die each for his own faith. The Jews loathe the creeds and rites of both Greeks and Egyptians: they are so jealous for their god that they always long to do battle for him.'

'The others are false gods,' protested Iris loudly. 'There is only one true god — and he is ours.'

'You see' — Parmenio blandly accepted the interruption — 'she is a Jewess. But the Egyptians are just as religious, for they cannot forget that they represent the ancient religion of the land and that the Jewish and Greek gods are interlopers. The Greeks, if not quite so pious, are even more pugnacious and the two qualities together produce a lofty spirit. Each of these communities maintains the superiority of its own gods in small things as in great, is instant to believe that they are being slighted and is, at any moment, prepared to prove by physical force that the gods of the others are ridiculous and fraudulent, if not brutish and abominable. They will fight because one has said that his god is a greater wonder-worker than another's, or existed earlier, or will last longer. They will fight over the chastity of their priests, the number of their adherents, the amount of their wealth, the beauty of their robes or the quality of their shoes. They die to

prove that the Temple of Isis at Memphis is grander than the Temple of Apollo here or the Jews' Temple in Jerusalem.'

'Our Temple,' said Iris calmly, 'is the greatest of all Temples, and it alone is holy.' Lucius told her to be quiet or go out.

'She is infected,' said Parmenio, 'by the air of Egypt. No one can withstand it. We draw religion in with every breath. There is no country which can match Egypt for the quality of its religious feeling. Its peoples not only think and speak religion, they act it.'

'Taught by the Jews!' said Iris, looking uneasily at Lucius.

Pericles raised a warning hand. 'The Greeks have brought beauty into their religion. Neither the Jews nor the Egyptians care for beauty.'

Parmenio dissented. 'What matters here is the intensity of the religious spirit. It lives deep down in the nature of the old Egyptian people; it colours the life of this country; it has spread from them to the Greeks and Jews.'

'Nothing in their religion ever came from the Egyptians to the Jews,' said Iris indignantly.

'Be quiet, Iris.' Lucius spoke sharply, 'or go out.'

'You know,' went on Parmenio, 'that different districts in Egypt devoutly worship different animals — the crocodile, the ape, the cat, the ox. Do you realize that one district will fight another to the death in order to maintain the superior claims of the bull or the ape or the crocodile over the cat? Do you know that if one district kills an animal that is sacred to another it is war to the death? Do you understand the nobility of it when far away up the Nile the inhabitants of one village will kill and eat one of their prisoners from another village in order to prove beyond doubt the superiority of their own god? Thus they display the religious spirit in all its liveliness.'

'You might certainly say,' remarked Pericles, 'that they put flesh and blood into it.'

'Why don't we Romans stop it, Lucius?' asked Metella.

'We let them be religious in their own way. It's our considered policy.'

'It pays you well,' said Parmenio. 'The Romans know their business. They have their own gods and they leave the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Jews with theirs. So they have four religions more or less at their service, and, up to the point where

order is seriously threatened, they allow the worshippers of the great three to quarrel, riot and kill. Thus they provide an outlet for the devotional instinct, permit every man's loyalty to his own gods, and win for themselves a name for tolerance. Rome puts all of us, and me especially, under a great debt. Since she tolerates all the gods, and of course she tolerates far more than are to be found in Egypt alone, all of them should support her. But I must be going. Remember my piece of news' — he gave a meaning little smile — 'I should take no solitary walks in the city before you leave for Antioch in three weeks' time. You are not going straight there, I believe, but overland by way of Damascus? I know the road and I envy you the journey.'

'How does he know so much about our movements?' asked Metella.

'Thyrsus!' said Lucius. 'He must have found it all out in Rome.'

Pericles escorted Parmenio to the door and remarked to him, 'I wish you would tell me something I have always wanted to ask you. You remember the priest of the temple where you received the famous oracle from Apollo; was he a great friend of yours? I mean — before he gave you the oracle?'

'The god was my friend,' said Parmenio piously. 'The god Apollo, the best friend I ever had. The next best was Publius Antonius!' He clapped Pericles heartily on the shoulder, rattled the little golden lion at him and strode away.

One fine morning, a fortnight later, Lucius and Pericles watched a ship cast anchor by the side of the great mole. It had come from Ephesus, about a hundred passengers came ashore with their baggage, and presently the two visitors walked back along with them to the city. About a score of the passengers were Jews, and on reaching the waterfront they turned left to make their way towards the Jewish quarter. It was the Sabbath, the great gates of the entrance to the quarter were closed, only one narrow door at the side being left open, and scarcely any Jews were going in or out. Almost all were within, observing the Sabbath rites. Nevertheless, the scene in the open space where the Jewish gates opened on to the Greek part of the city was busy, crowded and full of noise. There were imposing buildings on every side, among them several temples, including that of Apollo. In

the roadway were booths and stalls and, besides these, hawkers crying all sorts of cheap and handy articles. One loud-voiced fellow carried, slung round his neck, a tray full of cheap little metal brooches which he thrust boisterously in the faces of passers-by; Apollo was figured on them with the tripod of prophecy. Sometimes, when he saw his chance, the man waylaid a passenger and fixed the brooch in his or her cloak, demanding payment, and abusing anyone who refused to submit. He was selling the images for a festival which was to be held in honour of the god during the following week. The temple nearby, as well as himself, would profit by the sales.

Presently he saw the Jews from the ship approaching. They were quickly making for the entrance to their quarter. They wished, it being the Sabbath, to desist from the unwelcome activity that their voyage had imposed and to rest quietly in religious exercises. The hawker, kindling at the sight, advanced upon them, grinning, gesturing, shouting his wares. They took no notice of him. Presently he barred the way of two of them. One was an elderly, dingy-looking man, long-bearded and shuffling, whose whole purpose seemed to be concentrated on getting to the end of his journey. The other was a sturdy, confident young man, his son, who, like so many Jews at this time, was a soldier in the army of one of the minor Asiatic princes. He had earned a long leave and would be returning after some weeks with his family in Alexandria. His father had met him at the ship. The hawker flourished his brooches, but the pair of Jews, unheeding, passed on either side of him. He made a contemptuous face, turned, ran along by the old man, took him by the arm and addressed him with voluble insolence. When the soldier son pushed in between his father and the tormentor, the hawker slipped gaily to the other side, and again marched along by the old man, shouting his wares at the top of his voice. The old Jew grew nervous; he began to tremble, looked appealingly at his son and then tried to run. The hawker seized him, spun him round and with a sudden swoop fixed the brooch of Apollo in his cloak. The old Jew was transformed. The blasphemous affront changed him from a spiritless drudge into a furious rebel. He tore the brooch out, threw it on the ground and stamped on it. Then he struck the tray a blow that sent all the brooches flying.

Then he spat in the hawker's face and began to cry. The son, again pushing in to protect him, took his arm to draw him away. The hawker leapt at the young man who was bending over his father in an attempt to comfort him, and, while he was off his balance, struck him to the ground. He drove his foot violently into the old man's side and, while they both lay prostrate, began to cry out loudly that the Jews had attacked him, that they had robbed him, that they had insulted the god Apollo, that they had spat at the god's image and had trodden it underfoot. While he was still bawling some of the other Jews from the ship came around reproaching and hustling him, and the young soldier, having raised his father, turned round and struck the hawker violently in the face. Partisans ran up on both sides; in no time at all a crowd had gathered, stones were thrown, Greeks ran out from the neighbouring streets, Jews emerged from their quarter and the native Egyptians mustered at the signs of battle. In a few minutes a shouting, swaying mob was fighting furiously. Part of it was in hand-to-hand conflict; part of it had separated into groups who were stoning each other.

Lucius and Pericles had drawn aside when the brawl began. They were a little distance away from the entrance to the Jewish quarter and were watching the scene eagerly but detached as the tumult grew.

'There!' said Lucius, 'You see Parmenio knew. Devotion to Apollo, contempt for Apollo; loyalty to the Jewish god, hatred for the Jewish god — and there's the result!' He pointed to where, as the mob parted, closed and parted again, the bodies of the old Jew, his son and the hawker were to be seen, now with a good many others, prostrate on the ground.

'Mark the deeply religious character of the people, Pericles.'

'I think we had better be moving, sir, or, without ourselves being so devout, we shall be suffering as though we were.'

There was a surge of the rioting crowd towards them. The Jews were being driven away from the gates of their quarter. The single gate was shut lest the enemy should force a way through, but now numbers of Jews were coming to the rescue of their fellows. They clambered over the great gates, dropped down on the other side and joined the battle. Still the flood was moving towards Lucius and Pericles. Suddenly a stone struck Pericles

on the shoulder, another Lucius on the cheek, though there was not much force in it, and a whole shower of missiles rattled on the building behind them.

'I believe they're aiming at us,' cried Lucius. 'Look! At the back there! All the stones are coming from there.' He ducked suddenly as a large piece of stone flew just over his head. Pericles was hit on the forehead and the blood was running down his face. The crowd swayed away, and for a moment, before they were hidden again, a small group of men in the background were to be clearly seen collecting missiles and hurling them with method and industry at Lucius and his companion.

Lucius looked round. 'Yes, the sooner we get out the better, but where?' They could see no break in the line of buildings on either side of them; the mob was in front and on either flank. The aim of their enemies was wild; most of the stones missed them but one or two had hit and it was only a question of time before they were struck down. Pericles had already been half-stunned.

'It's no use stopping here to be killed,' said Lucius, 'we'd better join in the row — we shall have a better chance.' They rushed forward and plunged into the ranks of the Jews, seeking to hide themselves in the crowd. As they did so Lucius found himself plucked from behind. An unknown man had hold of his arm. 'This way! I'll show you,' and he dragged at Lucius. 'No!' said Lucius, 'Who are you? I don't know you, we'll stop here. It's a trap!' he said to Pericles. The crowd round them was thinning. The Jews in their part of the riot were being dispersed and pinned back against the buildings; the bloodshed grew.

The man spoke again urgently. 'Come on, or you're done for. I'm not waiting here to be killed. My master sent me — Parmenio. He saw you from the temple.'

Lucius still resisted, but Pericles said, 'Come, master. It's all right. He couldn't know that Parmenio is now friendly to us unless he really came from him.' The man was going, and Pericles dragged Lucius after him. Their guide, stooping down and beckoning them to do the same, skirted the back of the crowd for a little way, then scurried across to the buildings and darted down an alley-way so narrow that it could scarcely be seen until one was close on it. As they entered the alley Lucius turned and

out of the corner of his eye saw, for a second, the group of assailants looking about to see if they could discover what had happened to their victims. Some yards up the alley their rescuer turned and then again led them along more passages, opened a door in a wall, crossed a courtyard and entered a tall building from the rear. He took them straight through it to a room which looked on to the great square. A man was standing with his back to them watching the riot. It was Parmenio.

He turned to them with a stern shake of the head. 'I warned you!'

'You didn't warn us against going out together — the two of us,' said Lucius. 'You said I wasn't to go alone.'

'If you walk about on the Jews' Sabbath, near to the gates of the quarter, you can expect trouble. You need an escort. Do you not understand that days sacred to religion are the most dangerous of all? On no other day is the spirit so highly moved. Look at those bodies out there — could you equal that in tolerant, easy Rome, or even in Antioch, where they will only quarrel in words about religion and rarely risk their lives? Besides, I told you that you were in special danger.' He stepped back and cautiously beckoned Lucius to look out. A big heavy man was coming with a remarkably light step towards the temple.

'Look, Lucius Paetus.'

'Thyrsus!'

'I told you that he was in Alexandria, but you thought little of my warning. Now you know. My servant will take you out by the back to see you on your way home. Thyrsus will be coming here. I hope he didn't see my man guiding you — it might be a little awkward to explain.' He smiled as if he would have liked to have had to explain. 'Anyhow there was nothing else to be done. I couldn't let you be killed. It wouldn't have been fair to my benefactor, Publius Antonius. You will tell him that I have tried to help you, won't you? I value his co-operation most highly, and I want to be on good terms with him when I return to Rome. I am relying on him to help me in Roman society. Commend me, please, to your wife, and the best luck to Young Publius! — oh yes, I know all about him — and don't be too long about getting to Antioch. Being on the staff you'll be safer there than here and, in any event, Antioch is more a Roman city than

is Alexandria. I think you'll be all right when you get away from here.' He led them to the back of the house, sent his slave out first to make sure that they hadn't been followed and parted from them with the most friendly assurances. Especially, he said, they must restore his reputation with Publius Antonius. The matter was greatly on his conscience. He broke into light-hearted singing as he went back to the house. They set off home, and as they went, were painfully aware of their aches and bruises. Lucius was suddenly seized with anxiety lest in their absence something dreadful might have happened to Metella. But she had had a quiet morning. She and Iris set to work to attend to their wounds and Metella stated repeatedly that she would never have a moment's peace until they left for Syria. Iris agreed. She added that Syria was, in any event, a desirable and most famous country, being a direct continuation of Judaea. They sailed in the middle of October.

CHAPTER VI

Lúcrus had to decide how he was to visit Damascus and, at the same time, escort his wife and child to Antioch where, in a few weeks' time, Vitellius would begin his year of office. He eventually found a cargo vessel which, with a few passengers, traded to the ports of Judaea, to the Phoenician cities, Tyre and Sidon, and, if weather permitted, to Seleucia, the port of Antioch. He found from the ship's master that he could land at Ptolemais, in northern Palestine, go to Damascus, spend a day or two there and then return to Tyre by a more northerly route in time to catch the boat before it set off again for Sidon. Metella asked, 'Can we take Publius with us to Damascus?' to which Lucius replied with a firm 'No', saying that the risks in the wild country would be much too great. 'And, may I ask,' he added, 'who are "we" and "us"?'

'You and I, Lucius.'

'Oh, you're not going. It's no journey for a woman.'

'Woman fiddlesticks! You're not going without me, and you don't want to. I've the best feminine qualities when they're

wanted, but I can be a very Clytemnaestra when I choose.'

'She means, sir,' explained Pericles, courteously, 'that though a woman she has a man's will, and she is right, if I may say so.'

'Oh, you may say so, Pericles, and you will do anyhow, but I didn't really suppose she meant she was capable, like Clytemnaestra, of killing her husband. Well, I suppose you'll have to come, Metella, though I don't like it.'

'Thank you, Lucius. I knew that without me you wouldn't be happy and, besides, you couldn't deny me the pleasure of seeing a strange country. I only wish that you could come too, Pericles, and you, Iris, but you'll both have to stay on board and guard Young Publius from Ptolemais until we rejoin you at Tyre. There's another thing, Lucius. We ought to find out whether Thrysus is still in Alexandria. If he is, no doubt he'll know where we're going and we can't have him turning up on the boat at Ptolemais while we are far away in Damascus.' Lucius agreed, so Pericles was sent to consult Parmenio. He brought back word that Thrysus had already left Alexandria for Rome. 'He can't come back by sea now,' said Parmenio, 'until the winter is over. I doubt whether he will come to Asia by land, and even then he would have to do the last stage to Cyprus by sea. Besides, I question whether he wants to come back at present. I rather think there is a certain coolness just now between him and his patron, but of course it may not mean anything.'

When they were on board and waiting for the ship to start, an enormous basket of flowers, addressed to Metella, was brought aboard. The slave who brought it immediately disappeared. The basket contained a letter which asked Metella to accept the gift 'from Parmenio, the priest of Apollo, your respectful and admiring servant.' Lucius laughed. 'He's a rascal! You'll see, some day he'll be head of the great Temple of Apollo in Rome. It will be the resort of all the fashionable women. He'll probably claim Publius Antonius as his principal supporter.'

They skirted along the coast of Egypt, passing the point where Pompey the Great was murdered. Then, turning north, they worked their way up the coast of Judaea. Iris watched the shore intently. When they passed her native village near Joppa and saw the point where she and her parents had been carried off by the slavers she stood rigidly at the ship's side gazing with set face

and angry eyes, and she told Metella and Lucius, who felt for her, that if such things happened it was the fault of Rome since Rome was all-powerful and, if Rome herself would not let other people alone, she should guarantee them security from their other enemies.

At Ptolemais Lucius and Metella left the ship after giving Pericles and Iris careful instructions about Young Publius and after entrusting both him and them to the care of the ship's master, who assured them that he would on no account leave Tyre before they arrived. They set off almost immediately with a caravan of about a hundred people, most of them from their own ship and some others which had recently entered the port. They had a strong guard with them, some of it provided by the authorities whose function it was to protect the traffic between Damascus and the port, and some by the merchants who suspected that the official escort might be weak or untrustworthy; all of them, passengers and guards alike, were telling each other stories of the brigands who lay hidden in the hills of Galilee and still more in the mountainous country on the other side of Jordan. In their caravan were camels, mules and asses. Metella and Lucius were persuaded to try camel's milk. They drank it rapidly and without food, knowing nothing of its capacity to curdle in the stomach, and paid for their ignorance. They learned how true was the saying that the rule in Syria was fleas for the animals and flies for human beings, except that the fleas recognized no distinction. They saw the children of the villages hunting for the hard-shelled snails and little lizards which were commonly eaten and they were warned against the scorpions and snakes which were a constant danger. They soon crossed the coastal plain and were climbing up into the hills, where they were astonished at the number of streams flowing down towards the Mediterranean. A few hours more and they were descending into the valley of the Jordan — 'Oh, why did we not bring Iris?' said Metella. And here there seemed to be even more streams than they had seen flowing the other way. Then, as they crossed the Jordan itself and entered the mountainous region which stretched all the way to Damascus they saw, towering over them from the north, the splendid height of snowy Hermon. The multitude of streams, these too flowing into the Jordan from the

eastern side, was still there, but the land became bleaker, the mountains more desolate, the thorn-bush was encroaching from the desert, and they saw buildings made of blocks of lava stone. Fifteen miles from the city Hermon rose above them on their left; the famous river Pharpar ran close by their road, while on the other side of it they saw a waste of broken, rugged lumps of lava, the shattered remains of a flow from a long extinct volcano. One of the escort, who himself came from Damascus, pointed to a building some distance off the road. 'The great Alexander is buried there,' he said proudly, 'Alexander the Greek Conqueror.'

Lucius smiled at him pleasantly. 'The great Alexander died near Babylon, and his body was buried in Alexandria.'

'I don't know where he died,' replied the man, 'but he is buried here.' He added conclusively, 'You have to pay to see the tomb.'

'But,' said Lucius, 'his tomb is in one of the famous buildings in Alexandria, and you pay there, too.'

'Then it is a fraud,' the man rejoined. 'The people of Alexandria invented the story in order to make money. The only genuine tomb is here.'

'That it is not!' A loud voice broke in. It was the Captain of the escort, a much-travelled fighting man. 'I am from Babylon and I have myself seen the tomb of Alexander in that city. There is no doubt of it.'

'How are you so sure?' asked Lucius.

'Because ever since Alexander died all the guardians of the tomb have been directly descended from one of his soldiers. They say so themselves.'

'It is three hundred and sixty years,' said Lucius, lifting his eyebrows. 'A long time. What is the proof?'

'Their graves!' The Captain was indignant. 'Twelve generations, twelve graves side by side, twelve guardians in direct descent from a Macedonian spearman.'

'Do you pay to go in?' asked Lucius. 'You ought to with all that thrown in.'

'Thousands are glad to pay,' was the reply, 'for they come from all parts and worship Alexander as a god.'

'That is impious,' cried another man, a wild fellow from the Arabian desert, 'and also fraudulent. His tomb is at Gaugamela,

the field of victory over Darius, the Great King of the Persians. He desired to be buried there, and he was.'

'What is the proof?' The Captain repeated Lucius's question.

'The tomb is guarded by a herd of horses that are descended from Alexander's famous charger Bucephalus.'

'That beats the directly descended guardians at Babylon,' said Lucius.

'Nevertheless, there is a tomb at Babylon.' The Captain was confident.

'And one at Gaugamela,' said the man from the desert.

'And that one over there.' The guard who had spoken first pointed eloquently.

'And also there are tombs, I am sure' — Lucius looked round his companions — 'in every place where Alexander slept or wept or won a battle — at Persepolis and Susa, Ecbatana and Meshed, Bactra and Jhelum, Maracanda, Zadracarta and Damgahn, and fees at all of them.'

'It may indeed be so,' said the Captain, greatly impressed, 'for a man must make a living, and Alexander dead is worth more to some of us than he ever was alive.'

As they drew closer to the city they admired the richness of the Pharpar valley, the rushing stream, the splendid trees along its banks — willows and poplars, walnut and apricot, all still in leaf. The farther view was barred by the hills along whose flank the road ran until, near to the city, it took a sudden turn. There, spread out before them was the valley of the great Abana river, split into seven separate streams which watered the magnificent oasis of Damascus. At a glance they saw why, to the desert dweller, Damascus exemplified all the delights which desert-life denied.

Lucius reported his arrival to the Roman Prefect of the city, a youngish, elegant, sensitive man who rejoiced to see a fresh Roman face. Presenting his authority, Lucius asked to be informed about Judaea. The Prefect invited him to ask questions; then, having spent some time in answering them, said, 'You'd better see some of our reports — not all of them, for we have enough to fill a mansion. There's not much goes on down there,' he nodded towards the south, 'that we don't know. We have our agents in Judaea — Pilate knows that but not who they are! —

and we keep a sharp watch here in Damascus. We have to, for all sorts of dangerous characters come here not only from Judaea but from the desert and from Parthia. There's a constant to and fro, rebels escaping from the surrounding country, mischief-makers creeping into it, desperadoes seeking refuge, smugglers of goods, of women and of weapons — they all go through Damascus. Well, take a look at these reports. This lot' — he put down one fat bundle — 'is from our agents in Judaea and the south. These', he took another pile from a shelf, 'are written by my own men in Damascus, all during recent weeks. Smart fellows, my men.' He flipped over the pages. 'Look at this — ten days ago.' The report read —

'Stopped a cart leaving by the East Gate at the opening rush-hour. Suspicious because of the speed at which it was going. Two men with it. When told we would examine contents they made off. One got away, the other was killed. The dead one was an Armenian: nothing known of him. Found a lot of arms under a load of miscellaneous goods. Roman legionary weapons, brand new. Failed to trace origin of cart.'

'Arms stolen?' asked Lucius, without looking up.

'Or sold by our men. More likely.'

'What can they spend the money on in an outpost like this?'

'My grandmother, Lucius Paetus, always told me to "look for the woman". On women, of course! Syria's most flourishing industry. Haven't our City Fathers always said that trade follows the standards? Now here's another report. I know about this one myself.' The edge of some excitement came into the Prefect's voice. Lucius read —

'Young woman describing herself as Parthian princess — the royal house — came to military post to-day. Claimed our protection. Had fled disguised with company of merchants trading to Syria. Would not say why she had fled but declared she possessed information about Parthian plans against Rome. Could only give it to Vitellius personally. Sent her to Prefect.'

'What did you do with her?' said Lucius.

'Sent her to Vitellius! She can wait for him at Antioch. If she's a Princess there will be trouble with Parthia, and if she isn't, I daren't keep her here. She was much too pretty. I can't stand temptation.'

'Did she tell you why she had run away?'

'Said her husband didn't understand her. I had to pack her off or she'd have been the ruin of me. Of course, if you find her at headquarters in Antioch, you can drop her a hint to look in and see me when she comes this way again. No harm in that — I hope.' The Prefect sighed. She *was* pretty.' Then, tearing himself out of his reverie, 'Come, come, Lucius Paetus,' he said sternly, 'we mustn't dawdle. Here's a queer story. What do you make of this one?'

Lucius read the report —

'On afternoon duty at the southern gate. Heard shouts and saw a crowd coming on the road from Judaea. People running up from every side, jostling to get a look at a man in the centre. Short, thick-set, bow-legged; thin lips, not much hair, hooked nose (a Jew all right), eyebrows almost meeting. Thought he might be a robber being brought in. Then saw that though his eyes were open they were blank and staring. His arms were thrown out in front of him, he kept pushing away those who were leading him and tried to make his way by himself but lost direction and had to let them. Seemed to be known to a good few. There was a great block at the gate but I stopped and questioned them. Got nothing out of the man himself, but heard about him from the others. Came from Jerusalem. Had been useful to the High Priests and the Procurator in tracking down the followers of a rebel leader, Jesus, whom Pilate executed.'

'So Pilate did,' said the Prefect. 'See reports passim. Jesus wanted to be King of the Jews. Go on!'

'He had begun to have doubts about this Jesus, thought Jesus might have been right after all, couldn't sleep, worked himself up, went half-mad, and outside Damascus had a fit and went blind. He had been muttering ever since and was

muttering when I saw him. Seemed to be extremely angry, then bewildered and, when finally I let them go, was weeping violently. I couldn't make anything of his mutterings, but some of them who had heard him from the start said they thought he might be going over to the rebel side. An obstinate, contentious man, they said. Possibly dangerous. Suggest he should be watched.'

'Jew; Roman citizen; name of Paul; from Tarsus, Cilicia.'

'Odd,' said Lucius. 'Did you have him watched?'

'Oh yes, and my man was right, too. I told you they were smart. When this fellow recovered — he got his sight back — he started defending the rebel Jesus to his fellow-Jews. We found out that much.'

'What have you done with him?'

'Nothing. Can't do anything. He's gone. Disappeared. He isn't there.'

'Couldn't you stop him?'

'My dear sir! Hundreds of people crowd to go out when the gates are opened in the morning, just as they crowd to come in at night when the gates are to be shut. He could have blacked his face and walked out boldly, or for that matter walked out without blacking his face, or gone out concealed under a cartload of anything, or have been let down from the walls at night.'

'Don't you patrol the walls?'

'We do, but we are not allowed enough men to do it properly. Rome starves us, you know. Rome never understands these frontier problems, and they won't be told. And even if we had twice the patrols, what can you do when someone raises a shindy at one end of a section and, while the patrol hurries there, the accomplices run a ladder up and let a friend down from the wall? The whole thing is over in a few moments. We can't keep people from getting in at night, let alone getting out. Anyway, this fellow may be all talk, and if he isn't, we shall hear from him again.'

Metella opened the door. 'I thought,' she said, looking at them both, 'that my husband was going to show me the sights?'

The Prefect, with open admiration, acted promptly. 'No,' he said, 'quite impossible! Your husband has to study these docu-

ments. It'll take him hours.' He grabbed another armful from the shelves and thrust them in front of Lucius. 'Letters from Pilate and about Pilate, reports from our frontier outposts, despatches from the Euphrates. Most important! We'll give you two hours.' He turned to Metella and said, 'I'll show you the sights,' and, beaming, carried her off.

He took her to see the street of the tent-makers, the street of the bakers, the street of the saddlers and all the other streets where those of one trade worked together. He took her a tour of the walls and then to the top of one of the watch-towers. Thence Metella looked out on to the luxuriance of the Damascus plain, beyond it to the green marshes where the great Abana river disappeared in the sands, and beyond them again, to the grey mists of the barren desert that stretched limitless to the east and south.

When, after more than three hours, they returned, the Prefect was as gay as could be. When he saw Lucius still reading and making notes, 'Ah, what industry!' he said. 'What praiseworthy self-education! It does me good to see you. You'll be Consul some day, except that education has nothing to do with it. Your wife, my dear Lucius Paetus, has so fallen in love with Damascus that she has given me her word to persuade Vitellius to let you — and her — live here six months of each year.' He appealed to Metella — 'You have, haven't you?'

Metella nodded happily. 'At least six months,' she said.

'You see, Lucius Paetus!'

'I see!' said Lucius grimly. 'You don't need to tell me what she's been doing to you. She's the most dangerous woman in the East. Come, girl!' He invited the Prefect to dinner and led Metella firmly away.

After a few days more in Damascus, and after Lucius had obtained all the reports that Vitellius could need, they set off again, this time direct for Tyre. Their road was farther north than before, but the first part lay over the same bare mountainous slopes. The mountains ended abruptly and in the last four miles they descended nearly four thousand feet. Then they went down into the Jordan valley. At the bottom they found themselves in a maze of streams coming down from the Lebanons and from Mount Hermon just above them. All the valley was spongy. It was sometimes difficult to distinguish the streams from the sur-

rounding marshes, and everywhere there were dense thickets of reeds which it was difficult, and often dangerous, to penetrate. In the valley bottom they came to a place which the Greeks, arriving centuries before, had declared sacred to the god Pan; they had called it Paneas. Here was a cavern in a cliff and from the boulders which bestrewed the ground a generous stream burst forth in many rivulets. 'This,' said the chief of their escort, a man of the desert who had lived long in Syrian cities, 'is one of the two main sources of the Jordan. An hour's journey further on we shall see the other.' This, too, they found, burst up suddenly from the earth among a mass of rocks. Both sources produced, in a few moments, the volume of strong rivers, their lively energy already symbolizing the Jordan of the Jews.

'At least I can tell your father,' said Lucius to Metella, 'that we have seen the sources of the Jordan, which Iris says is greater than the Nile.' He spoke to the guide. 'I suppose there's no doubt these are the sources?'

'These are generally accepted because here the river springs already strongly from the depths of the earth, but it is true that there are those who claim the title for other streams that come direct from the mountains further north.'

'I knew it!' cried Lucius. 'It is like Alexander's tomb. In a country of marvels each place must have its wonder.'

'The Jordan!' said the guide, contemptuously, 'A pretty wonder! The Leontes or the Orontes if you like, or the Abana or the Pharpar, but why the Jordan, a wretched little stream buried at the bottom of a ditch?'

'The Jews think well of it,' said Metella.

The man spat. 'The Jews! Nothing that matters has ever happened at their Jordan. No one, except themselves, has ever heard of it.'

'All the same,' said Lucius, 'it's a remarkable river that runs in a ditch far below sea-level as they say the Jordan does.'

'Tell it to the Jews then! It's their ditch. The Jordan a marvel!' The man was full of scorn.

'At any rate,' said Lucius, 'we'll take some of it to Iris. She'll think it marvellous.' They filled two leathern bottles from the Jordan's springs.

Then they went up into the hills again, with the rivers rushing

to the Jordan, and down again on the other side where the streams ran to the Mediterranean. Again they wondered at this land of generous waters so close to the parched desert. Unmolested by robbers they arrived in Tyre with a day or two to spare. Their ship was loading now for Sidon. Pericles and Iris had nothing untoward to report to them. They had carefully watched over Young Publius, who seemed to his parents to have grown wonderfully in size, beauty and wisdom since they left him at Ptolemais a week or two before.

Iris was delighted at the water from the Jordan. She declared that, like the Jews among the peoples, the Jordan had been chosen by Jehovah to be supreme among all rivers.

They were soon at sea again. They were delighted to find that the ship was going straight on from Sidon to Seleucia, its last trip before the winter closed navigation. An officer stationed at Cyprus had come on board at Tyre. He also was going to Antioch. He had been instructed to report to Vitellius about the affairs of Cyprus and the problems of Syria as seen from the island. He was a friendly man with whom they were soon on good terms. They asked him if he knew an exile called Aulus Cornelius, who had been in Cyprus since Sejanus fell, three years before. He replied that he not only knew Aulus Cornelius well, but had for some time been responsible for his safe detention. Aulus had given no trouble; he was too shrewd for that; he was visited by a freedman who went to and from Rome on his behalf; and he lived very quietly—‘as indeed’, said the officer, ‘an exile does if he is wise’. In any case, like all the exiles, he was closely watched. He had heard, he said, that but for the crash of Sejanus, Aulus was to have been married and that the girl had immediately thrown herself at another man in order to escape being involved in the danger, but he knew nothing about that. Anyway, he thought Aulus must have got over it by now though he wasn’t one to talk.

‘Do you think he’s got over it?’ Metella asked Iris when the officer had gone and they were standing by the side of the ship, looking out in the direction of Cyprus, which was then some forty miles away to the left.

‘No,’ said Iris, ‘I should think he’s worse than when he went there.’

'Why?' asked Metella. 'Do you mean because he knows about me and my having a child — if he does?'

'You know,' replied Iris, 'what Thyrsus told Pericles — that he was going to tell Aulus Cornelius everything that he knew or could invent about the birth of Young Publius in order to torment him. He would do it — we know what he's like — and he would succeed. Aulus would believe everything, whether true or not, and enough of it was true. One of our wise Jews has said that death and life are in the power of the tongue. It would be so for Aulus when Thyrsus told him what had happened to you. He would be more revengeful even than before.'

Metella spoke resentfully. 'He must have known all the time what was likely to happen. It was natural, wasn't it? He knew we were married. He could have got used to the idea.'

'Not Aulus, madam. He would not get used to it. I knew him at that time, in his house, I saw the way he looked at you and I knew the way he spoke about you. You remember what Thyrsus said about him — that in imagination he saw everything that happened between you and the Master, and sometimes more than happened, and he could not endure it.'

'You know all about it, of course, at the age of eighteen,' said Metella smilingly.

'Slaves know as much of these things,' said Iris, firmly, 'as free people. They can't marry but they can love each other. I knew a young slave who went almost mad because his master or his master's son took, by force, the girl he was in love with. They sold the man when he was troublesome. They sold the girl, too, when she was done with. There was another girl who was in love with a fellow-slave and their mistress wanted him. He refused, so she sent him away to one of her country places. What she did with him and to him after that no one knew, but she told the girl triumphantly that she had had no trouble with him. No one heard of him any more and the girl killed herself. I should have felt that way myself, only I would have killed the old hag first.'

'Don't talk like that to anyone but me or you will suffer for it. Every Roman is scared of the slaves and on the watch. I wonder if Aulus knows we are going to Antioch?'

'He's sure to. From his spy, Thyrsus. Let's hope it's true that he's closely watched.'

They came to Seleucia, disembarked and finished the journey to Antioch, less than twenty miles, by road. The city delighted them. Most of it lay on the northern bank of the Orontes, with a range of hills immediately behind, and many of the houses built upon the slopes. A great wall, built by the Greek rulers before the Romans came, ran along the crests of the hills, encompassing the city. The sight of it against the skyline as it bestrode the hills gave the citizen a feeling of impregnability which was both pleasing and unjustified. The principal streets were broad and long, flanked by covered colonnades and noble buildings, many of them the gift of Greek or Oriental or Roman benefactors.

Metella wrote to her father with delight —

‘Have we not been lucky? We have now seen Alexandria, Damascus and Antioch, and all three, whatever else be said about them, have that which delights Romans — abundance of good, cold, clean water. There are baths everywhere — and then the light! Do you know that there are streets in Antioch which are brightly lit by lamps at night? Neither in Rome, nor in Alexandria, is there anything like that.

Nor is there anything like Daphne, which is five miles from Antioch. It is the most lovely place imaginable, with springs and trees and flowers and noble shrines, but the rich men of Antioch are pushing their villas out towards it and soon it will be only a suburb of the city. There is a temple of Apollo there and a colossal statue of the god. Lucius says he expects every day to find that Parmenio has obtained the priesthood — with your help, of course! For the people of Antioch, Daphne is the favourite place of relaxation, and grave Romans, like my Lucius, say that they would be better occupied at home, for it is in some ways of doubtful reputation.

The people here are gay and lighthearted; what more natural than that they should delight in sparkling waters and in bright lights by night? They are independent of mind and impudent too. It’s a merry city, I can tell you. You would sometimes think they do no work at all, so much time is spent in the theatre, in dancing, in chariot-races, and in every kind of amusement. Lucius says this is due to the queer

mixture of races here — Romans and Greeks and Jews, tribesmen from the deserts (queer birds these are) and all kinds of Easterners from the Euphrates and the Tigris, from Armenia and Cilicia and distant regions whose names I don't know.

We are expecting Vitellius in a few weeks now. Then we shall all be busy. Lucius is most impressive about him. He says that Vitellius has been sent out to settle the East on the principle approved by the Emperor, who wants everything kept quiet, and no cost to the State. So now I shall learn something about high politics in order to fit myself as a suitable companion for that coming statesman Lucius Paetus.'

Publius replied in some excitement to this letter. 'Don't you know,' he said, 'that Daphne gets its name from the bay tree that grows there and that at the sacred fountain nearby is an oracle of Apollo? They say that if a leaf from the bay tree is cast into the water, the worshipper, when it comes out, will find written on it the words of the oracle, the reply to his question or his thoughts. Now what one wants to know, and what you should quietly investigate, is who puts the bay leaf into the fountain and who takes it out and delivers it to the worshipper.' Metella was reading the letter to her husband and Pericles. 'What do you say, Pericles?'

'I should say, madam, that whoever throws the leaf in, the priests would take care to keep it in their own hands after it had been subjected to the influence of the god.'

'What do you think, Lucius?'

'That it is a mistake to do anything that might weaken the people's faith in the old gods and in their priests. They need it all, and the Romans should encourage them. Your father's zeal to know is admirable for himself but not so good for the common people.'

Vitellius arrived early in the New Year. (It was now the year thirty-five in the Christian reckoning.) He told his staff, including Lucius, that he had been sent to make an orderly, permanent settlement of affairs in the East. Rome did not want conquests, invasions or revolts. Nor did she want to spend money. She wanted peace and economy. He soon had Lucius busy. He first

sent him to make a round of petty princes in Syria, inviting them to Antioch to a consultation; to be praised or censured, and to be directed for the future. He was next occupied with the Eastern frontiers from which Rome never ceased to fear attack. He desired to establish friendly governments in both Parthia and Armenia. 'We have no intention whatever of interfering with their independence,' he said. 'All we ask is that they should be friendly disposed to Rome, threatening her neither directly nor indirectly, and not allowing themselves to be used by others against her. We want them to feel that they are entirely free to do as they like provided they have rulers who do not act, and do not allow themselves to be used by others, to the injury of Rome.' Next, the question of Pontius Pilate came up. Lucius had presented his report; Vitellius had grimaced on reading it. Pilate was an efficient administrator. The proof was that he had already been eight years in his office. It was agreed that a man who could rule the Jews for eight years and still hold his office must have good, solid qualities. But latterly he had been offending the religious sense which was their most marked characteristic. When his troops entered Jerusalem they had, by his order, carried the standards which bore the images of the Emperor — an act of sacrilege in the eyes of the Jews, who recognized no images. When he brought a supply of water, by an aqueduct, into the city, he proposed to take money to pay for it from the Temple treasury, which again, as an act profaning their most sacred institution, roused them to fury. Vitellius summoned Pilate to Antioch for consultation. With Pilate came his wife, Claudia Procula. She was a fashionable, frivolous woman. She was delighted to visit Antioch even if the reason was that her husband was under criticism. She revelled in the shops, the baths and the theatres. She complained of the monotony of Judaea, the solitary life led by a Procurator's wife and the lack of civilized society. 'Nothing but Jews, and all that Pilate will say is that, after all, it is their country.' She said that Pilate was much too conscientious. He put his work before his wife, and got no thanks for it from Rome. Efficiency did not pay. It was because Pilate was efficient that the Emperor kept him in Judaea and looked like keeping him there for the rest of his life. It was like being buried alive. She had worked hard as a member of the Claudian house

to get him the Procuratorship, eight years before, but now she wished she hadn't. She protested to her distant kinswoman Lollia Claudia — 'Does Caesar never change his Governors? Or has he just forgotten we exist? Couldn't someone remind him?' Lollia had replied that the Emperor in his old age — and he was now seventy-six — was becoming more and more reluctant to change any arrangements that were working smoothly. 'He doesn't believe in chopping and changing,' she wrote to Procula, 'so there's only one way of procuring Pilate's recall. You must persuade him to do something outrageous, but, of course, that might end him as well as his Procuratorship, so I recommend patience to you. My dear, we are all being patient. Everyone desires to pay court to the young Gaius, but everyone fears lest his neighbour report it to old Tiberius. You know what I mean.'

Pilate was a prim little man. He had neat ideas and knew how to express them. He spoke in a precise, cold voice. He thought carefully about the problems he had to face.

Vitellius referred to the disputes over the images and standards and the raid on the Temple treasury to pay for the aqueduct. 'Let's get our policy clear,' he said. 'What are Caesar's orders? If the religious practices of the people we govern threaten Roman security — that is the test — we have to intervene, but otherwise we leave them freedom to conduct their religious affairs as they choose. That is so, isn't it? Now, I'm rather unhappy about these Jews. They occupy a most important position midway between Egypt and the Parthians and Syria, and we don't want friction with them. I don't think relations between them and you are very cordial?' Vitellius was always reasonable.

'They're not,' said Pilate, 'and, in my opinion, if they were there'd be something wrong. I've known them for eight years and I can assure you that the only way of dealing with them is to stand up to them. Give way to them and you'll never have a moment's peace. They'll put the screw on you every time. I speak from experience. To suppose that by letting them have their own way you'll make them grateful or obedient or loyal is — if I may say so with all respect — pure ignorance. I suggest, Lucius Vitellius, that in a matter of this kind, which involves understanding the people concerned, you must trust the man on the spot — that is, me.'

'But I'm afraid that I am the man on the spot, and I must fulfil the Emperor's policy.'

'Of course,' replied Pilate, 'you are my superior and I must carry out orders, but I have known these Jews for eight years. If I have not the authority I have the experience. I will venture to say that if the Emperor's policy is to let these Jews have their own way under the pretence that we must not interfere with their religion, they will end by defying us. We shall have to conquer them afresh, which this time may be no small affair.'

'But,' objected Vitellius, 'it is not a question of letting them have their own way but of not interfering with their religious beliefs, or prejudices if you like, unless they are a positive danger to us. They refused to have the images of the Emperors carried into Jerusalem, did they not? That did us no injury, so why insist on it?'

'Oh, but it did injure us. It denied our authority, it insulted the Emperor, it encouraged the Jews to despise us, it incited the whole East to defy us. We ought to have shown them, once and for all, who was master. In that way we might have avoided a war which, if this policy of surrender is continued, will be inevitable. The Jews are in a permanent state of spiritual rebellion and, I assure you, physical rebellion is never far off. We ought to scotch the beginnings. It could easily be done even now. We have to be just, of course, but we need to be firm and not so sentimental.'

'There is no actual rebellion?' said Vitellius.

'I should say there is plenty of it, even if it is in patches. There's always somebody rebelling. If they can't rebel against us, or anyone else ruling over them, they rebel against each other. It's in their blood. I've reported it to Rome, but a Governor who reports that he has to deal with civil disturbances when Caesar says there should not be any, is unpopular.' Pilate, in his turn, smiled on Vitellius — 'I take it that I'm here because you've seen some of those reports.'

'One can be just and firm,' suggested Vitellius, 'without being provocative?'

'Not if you are a Roman Procurator. In the eyes of the Jews he is always provocative. They want to have it both ways. They resent all interference and, on the other hand, they are rebellious,

often openly. Some of their priests work with us for their own purposes, but none of them really admits that any foreigner can rule over them. They recognize only their god as ruler. Besides, they have a queer notion of their own. They are always waiting for a mysterious being called the Messiah to appear, I don't know from where, and to set up his kingdom among them.'

'That shouldn't give much trouble to a man of your experience.'

'More than you think. You wouldn't believe how often an agitator, or fanatic preacher, or wild revolutionary appears. He may be a slave or a shepherd, a carpenter or a soldier from Parthia; it doesn't matter what he is, the Jews will listen to him if he promises that he will get rid of us Romans. The latest of them, a carpenter's son, started in Galilee, where, by the way, they wanted to make him king. He fled from there and then turned up in Jerusalem. He had a following of wild men from Galilee. He was at odds with the priests, he made a commotion in the Temple. That didn't matter much to us, but he was also declaring that this kingdom of his was going to come and make an end of Caesar's.'

'Well, you soon dealt with him if I'm thinking of the same rebel. What was he called? Judas of Galilee, wasn't it?'

'No, no! That's another man altogether — long before my time here. No, my man was called — oh, I can't remember. Alexander' — he spoke to his Graecized Jewish secretary, who knew everything. 'What was his name? — you know — the one we called "The King of the Jews" when we crucified him, the one who, their priests said, meant to burn down their Temple?'

'Jesus,' said Alexander.

'Yes, that'll be it. You're always right. But there are so many of these people. Yes, I dealt with him.'

'Just and firm!' said Vitellius. 'And if the priests were against him, as you say, you were not provocative. Therefore, quite satisfactory!'

'That's all you know,' said Pilate. 'Having failed to rouse the populace in Jerusalem in order to make himself king, which is what he was after, he tried to escape with his gang to Galilee. His whereabouts was betrayed by one of his own men. I caught him in flight on the outskirts of the City, tried him and had him crucified.'

'A proper end!' Vitellius nodded. 'I find no fault with that.'

'But it wasn't the end. That's why only a man who has lived among these Jews for many years can know them. His followers are increasing. I've had trouble with them, and there's trouble between them and the priests. It all adds to the general restlessness and there's too much of that anyway. His chief follower is a firebrand. He might be a nuisance to us if he were not so simple. You know the sort — a word and a blow! A tough, irrepressible, violent fellow.'

Alexander chipped in. 'Named Peter.'

'Is he?' said Pilate. 'I've only seen him once or twice. I've sometimes felt tempted to send him to join his master, but, of course, I mustn't be provocative. I'll tell you, Lucius Vitellius, what our Roman motto is for dealing with the Jews. "Never put down mischief to-day if you know it will be worse to-morrow." What do you say to that?'

Vitellius smiled indulgently. 'My dear Pontius, don't be provocative.'

'Well,' said Procula to Vitellius when he and Pilate entered the room where she was sitting with Metella, 'have you settled the Jewish question? It's been troubling the world for a long time now. Are you going to send Pilate back to Rome. I wish you would.'

'No, I've merely told him to make himself more popular with the Jews, and he doesn't like the idea.'

'We can't be more popular than we are with some of them,' replied Procula. 'Tell him, Pilate. It's the only funny thing I've heard during eight years in Palestine.'

'It's these Christians,' said Pilate. 'That's a handy name,' he explained to Metella, 'that they're giving them round here — after Christus, "the anointed" as they call the rebel Jesus.' Then he said to Vitellius — 'These Christians blame the other Jews, the priestly leaders and the lawyers and the rich men for getting me, as they say, to execute Jesus. The whole idea is now to fix the blame on their own people and to make out that I didn't want to execute him. They say I tried to find some way of saving him — comic, isn't it? They make out that, having tried to let him off and failed, I declared myself one of his followers as soon as he was crucified. I'm told some of them say that I bowed down

before the cross on which he was nailed. There's no end to the fantastic nonsense they are spreading. They even bring Procula into it.'

'You let me tell about myself,' said Procula. 'One of my slaves, a Jewess, goes to their meetings. They are spreading the story, she tells me, that I actually sent a message to Pilate, warning him not to injure this Jesus because he was a good man about whom I had had dreams. I assure you I'd never either seen him or heard him. Pilate had never mentioned him to me and, in any case, I never interfere with Pilate's work. But I'm supposed, like Pilate, to have become a follower of this new god. The idea is to show how intelligent and merciful we Romans are compared with the brutal Jewish priests.'

Pilate returned to Jerusalem after having received more good advice from Vitellius. 'Remember,' said Vitellius, in the kindest way, 'we preserve a great Empire by not interfering with the customs, especially the religious customs, of the subject peoples.'

'Very good,' said Pilate, 'but do you, on your side, remember that with a Jew his religion is his politics.'

They were saying farewell on the steps of Vitellius's palace, with their staffs round them.

'No violence!' said Vitellius, pleasantly.

'And no sentimentalism!' said Pilate, not less agreeable.

'I have my orders,' Vitellius gave a knowing nod.

'And I my conscience.' Pilate had the politest smile.

They laughed amiably, knowing each other. Vitellius said he hoped that Procula had enjoyed her stay in Antioch.

'Yes, indeed,' she said, 'but it has spoiled me for Judaea. You wouldn't believe how poor the shops are in Judaea. You have to go to Alexandria to get anything fit to wear, and then they all attack Pilate because the Procurator's wife doesn't patronize home industries. I say that a Claudia cannot be expected to wear sackcloth just to please the natives however much they like it for themselves. When we came here to Antioch I thought that perhaps you were going to send us back to Rome, and here we are returning to Judaea with orders to behave ourselves. I'd as soon be in Britain.'

Vitellius, going into the house, remarked to Lucius about Pilate — 'An able man, and he could do more for the Jews if they

would let him. But they're defiant and he's stubborn. I may have made some impression on him, but I don't know. His motto is "watch 'em, beat 'em, break 'em". Vitellius shook his head as though he gave it up.

One morning, about the middle of the year, Iris told Metella that a stranger asked to speak to her. He said he was a priest from one of the Greek temples in Antioch; he had an important message. When Metella saw him, he gave her two letters, then left without waiting for an answer. The first letter was from Aulus Cornelius. It announced that he was in Antioch, staying with the chief priest of the Temple of Apollo, a friend of 'our common acquaintance, Parmenio'. ('These professionals stick together,' he wrote.) He would be grateful if she would not mention his presence to anyone since he was supposed to be in Cyprus and the authorities had a short way with exiles who took leave of absence. He would expect to see her at the temple that night, soon after dusk. The tone of the letter showed no doubt that she would be there. The other letter was from Parmenio himself. It guaranteed the good faith of the priest of Apollo. Metella, it said, could safely trust herself to an interview in his temple.

'Shall you go?' said Iris.

'Certainly I shall,' replied Metella. 'Why should I not? What are you afraid of?'

'Kidnapping,' said Iris, 'or murder. Aulus Cornelius would do anything.'

'Nonsense,' said Metella, 'Not to me. At least he might kidnap if it were safe, which it isn't, but not murder. What he has cause to fear is that someone should report to the Governor that he has run away from Cyprus. That might be the end of him. He'll do me no harm. He only wants to see me and I might find out his plans.'

'Shall you tell the Master?' asked Iris. 'He ought to know.'

'No,' said Metella. 'I shan't tell him. He wouldn't let me see Aulus lest I should be harmed and he would want to report his action in leaving Cyprus. The Master thinks a lot about legality. He wouldn't approve of any exile, let alone Aulus, giving himself leave. He would say that if it were generally done it would discredit the machinery of government.'

'He would provide you with a guard.'

'I can't bear the idea of a guard, and Aulus may have someone on the watch who would warn him, so that I shouldn't see him and discover his plans. There are one or two things I'd like to hear about. No, I'll go alone.'

'Except for me,' said Iris.

'Oh, I know that you won't be left out of anything that concerns me. You can rescue me if he attempts kidnapping. But you won't be able to join in the talk. I must see him alone.'

'I shall be within reach,' said Iris, 'in case you want me. It might be good for him to know I'm there.'

'There's no need,' said Metella. 'I wasn't afraid of him before, and I'm not now.'

They arrived at the temple as soon as it was dusk. The chief priest came at once. He explained that a visitor named Aulus Cornelius, from Cyprus, had brought him a message from Parmenio; he was not only to assist this visitor but, most of all, he was to do all he could for the lady Metella, whose father, Parmenio wrote, had won for him the stewardship of Apollo in Alexandria and would, he hoped, do similar kindnesses to him in Rome. The priest added that Parmenio was becoming highly esteemed throughout the East for his prophetic powers; he was now the foremost champion of the pure religion of Apollo against all false doctrines and would probably, before long, transfer his mission to Rome, where he had already had a distinguished career. Then, indicating to Iris that she should remain where she was, he conducted Metella to a small room in which Aulus was waiting. Iris, however, slipped through the door and followed them silently, standing beside Metella for a second so that Aulus should have a clear sight of her, and then as softly retreated. Metella scarcely noticed. As she went into the room, Aulus, who had been standing looking out of a window with his back to the door, turned and looked steadily at her. He did not move towards her.

'A little older,' he said, 'but not much changed. Not much older either; the same Metella!'

'Oh, no,' she said lightly. 'I'm much older. I'm a staid married woman now with a family.'

'How many? I've only heard of one, I think.'

'That's all there is to hear of. Thyrsus told you, I suppose? He

said he would. I have — we have — one boy, we call him Publius, he's over two years old.' She spoke in a clear, friendly voice, as though he were an old acquaintance who would like to hear the news. Aulus's face was almost without expression as, not speaking, he kept his eyes fixed on her.

At last she said, 'But what are you doing here? I could hardly believe it when I saw the letter.'

'I came to see you. I knew that you were here.'

'But you are supposed to be in banishment in Cyprus. Do they give exiles leave to visit Syria in order to see their friends?'

'If they did I should have been over here long before now. No, I am not on leave. Officially I am, at this moment, a prisoner in Cyprus, but ill of fever, confined to my house by the physician Charmides, who will allow no one to see me until the fever abates, which will be some few hours after I am back on the island.'

'But how did you get here?'

'On the same boat that brought the Governor of Cyprus to see the Governor of Syria, the famous Vitellius. Fine, is it not, to travel with the Governor? But I'm afraid he didn't know. I was a stowaway. I have played Juppiter by appearing in a shower of gold to the physician Charmides, my guards in Cyprus, the captain of the ship, the crew, and the priest of Apollo here. Money opens many doors, even for an exile.'

'What will happen if you are found out?'

'You would not be troubled with me any more. So I don't propose to be found out. But there are other things I want to talk about.' He moved a few steps nearer to her. 'I have not changed, Metella.'

'Will you tell me,' she said, 'who attacked my husband and Pericles, in Alexandria?'

'Were they attacked?' he said. 'That was unfortunate.' He spoke with mock seriousness — then in a hard tone, 'You were not yourself molested, I hope? I should be very angry if it were so, but I don't think that happened?'

'No,' said Metella, 'it was not me, and that makes me suspicious. First there was a plot to surprise my husband, then Pericles was waylaid, and then both of them were attacked in a riot. It was Thyrsus, we know it was Thyrsus. He was seen twice and we were warned against him — by some friends,' she added hastily,

remembering that she must not bring in Parmenio. 'Did you tell him to do it?' Her colour was high, her voice firm and indignant.

Aulus went back a step or two and leaned against the wall. He was slightly amused and did not answer for a few seconds. Then, 'If I am rightly informed,' he said, 'Thyrsus was treated somewhat impolitely at your father's farm near Antium. Might it not be that anything he did at Alexandria — if he did anything, of course — was due to some natural irritation on his part? He was made to smart, I believe, and he is not forgiving.'

'He used violence to Iris,' said Metella. 'I believe you know all about what happened in Alexandria. Thyrsus might reasonably attack Pericles, who flogged him, but why not also attack me, who ordered the flogging, and not Lucius?'

'Perhaps he dislikes Lucius Paetus,' said Aulus with the air of one making a contribution to the subject. 'I sympathize with him.'

'Did you put Thyrsus on to murder Lucius? He had no motive himself.'

Aulus appeared to reflect deeply. 'Perhaps he wanted to punish you through your husband. Perhaps he thought that by killing your husband he would leave you alone and defenceless, which would be true, wouldn't it, if your husband were no longer there? No, I didn't try to murder your husband, but you must, in fairness, admit that things would be much simpler if Thyrsus had succeeded — supposing, of course, that he did anything.'

'What do you mean by that?' she said.

'Only that it would have removed the difficulty of the marriage which, it seems likely, will still be there when I come back to Rome. But I didn't come here to quarrel, Metella. I came because I had to see you. I would have come to Alexandria — I knew all about your being there — but it is a long way and my absence would have been discovered, which would have effectually ended all my plans about you by ending me. That would have been a pity, so I had to wait until a short visit here could be contrived. But I had to see you again and tell you that I love you as much as ever and that I will never give you up. Believe me, I shall come back to Rome.' He advanced again, and stood close to her, speaking passionately. 'Gaius will bring me back to Rome when he succeeds Tiberius Caesar. He will want to be

popular. He will want to be thought a kindly, generous ruler, unlike the gloomy, harsh, Tiberius. You'll see, he'll release prisoners, bring back exiles — me among them. I shall be part of the general joy, introducing the new age, and then I shall claim you again, Lucius or no Lucius. It is all fixed, all certain, beyond your power to alter. It is only a question of the when and how.'

'If that is true,' she said, 'you will waste your time as you have wasted it these last four years in thinking about me. It must be living on a desolate island that makes you think so much about the past. You should put me out of your mind. When you get back to the life of Rome you will have something better to do than worry about a Roman matron with a house, a husband and family to look after.'

He shook his head. He looked at her as he had looked at her four years before, but more desiring now and more resentful that she would have none of him. Then he said —

'You will see. I have given you warning, and remember I may not always be able to restrain Thyrsus. There is no doubt he has prejudices.'

'Then if he wants to hurt anyone let him attack me. It was I who judged and punished him, not Lucius. Lucius was not there.'

'Of course he won't attack you. Believe me he will do exactly as I tell him. I will let you into a secret. I know a few things about Thyrsus's early days. I learned them from a slave of mine who recognized him when he first followed me to Cyprus. No, no, the terrible Thyrsus — you know he boasts of the title — is much too wise to provoke me to use my knowledge about his early life. He doesn't know how much I know about him but he suspects enough, I think, to be obedient to me.'

'I want you to say that you'll let Lucius alone,' said Metella.

'Oh, that!' he replied. 'Why, Lucius is nothing at all to me except that he is your husband. If he will stand aside he will confer a benefit on both you and me and if there is any danger to himself he would remove it once and for all. That is how things stand.'

After this they had no more to say to each other. Metella bade him good-bye and left with Iris. The priest said he hoped he

might tell Parmenio that Metella was satisfied with his services. He hoped also that she had had a happy meeting with Aulus Cornelius, and that all would now be well. He would see to it that the young man got back safely in good time to his ship. He was delighted with the gift, a silver candlestick, which Metella made to the temple in recognition of his services.

During these months, and until the autumn again closed the seas for ships, occasional letters came to Lucius and Metella from their kinsfolk and friends in Italy. They were mostly about family affairs, but they told something also of what was going on in Rome. They tried also to give hints of the question which was occupying everyone's mind — the succession to supreme power. But the writing was cautious. They wrapped up the information they sought to convey in discreet terms lest somewhere between Rome and Syria the letters should fall into the wrong hands, with unpleasant results to their authors.

'You remember [wrote Publius] how a year or two ago Caesar complained that he was threatened by personal enemies and how the Senate gave him permission to bring a military escort with him when he entered the Senate. It had been hoped that this would help to bring him back to Rome, but alas! though he sometimes comes near the City, he never enters it and we still have the feeling that either the Senate, or the people, or both, are, however innocently, disliked by him. The people, whatever their rank, are filled with fear that they have offended him and that they may have to suffer for what was never intended. They wish that he would show himself again in Rome; when he is remote they fear.'

A little later he wrote of that most dangerous subject, Tiberius's health and the succession —

'The news from Capreae is that Caesar is wonderfully well for a man of seventy-six. The gods be praised! Rome is grateful, not knowing who will follow him but only that it will not be anyone so good. Gaius, who most people think will succeed him when the necessity arises — may it be long distant! — is, as ever, quiet, restrained and inconspicuous. Various important persons have recently paid him great

attention, proposed honours to him (as being so much honoured by Caesar) and made him personal gifts. He is most discreet. He accepts little, declines much and assigns to Caesar the credit for anything praiseworthy that he is supposed to have done himself. The uncharitable say that he plays his cards well, others that he is afraid. Some profess to rejoice, others to fear, about the future; all wonder. The other candidate for power, at least so he is spoken of, is Tiberius Gemellus, Caesar's grandson, a sixteen year old lad. It is sad that his health should be so poor that, as many think, he will not long survive Caesar.'

'What does father mean,' said Metella, 'by saying that Gemellus is not strong? No one suggested that when we were in Rome. He was said to be a lively, healthy lad.'

'The point,' said Lucius, 'is in the last sentence. He means that Gemellus, if Gaius succeeds Tiberius in power, is not likely to be allowed to live, but in order to conceal his meaning he invents a weakness in health that is not there.'

From time to time Publius mentioned cautiously the prosecutions for treason that were taking place against well-known Romans. In the late summer he wrote —

'Do you remember Paconianus who, just before Sejanus died, was heard saying what he would do to young Gaius, against whom he was, in fact, collecting evidence? He is dead. He was sent to prison recently and while there wrote some verses that were directed against Caesar — so they said. I have no sympathy for him — at one time he turned informer against his friends. But I think I will not at present write that poem on the rule of Tiberius Caesar which I used to contemplate. The conditions of the time, much though we may and do owe to Caesar, are not such, I feel, as to give the poet wings.'

In the spring of the next year — this was 36 in the Christian era — as soon as the sea was open again there came bad news of Publius. There had been a great fire in Rome, one of the most disastrous the city had ever known. Part of the Circus Maximus and most of the buildings on the Aventine Hill, mansions and tenements alike, had been destroyed. A strong wind was blowing,

the fire spread rapidly, the firemen were summoned from the whole of the city but the task was beyond them. Publius — it was Caecilia who sent the news — had hurried off to the scene of the fire, where he had joined other Senators. Presently they were helping to organize the attack of the firemen; then, to set an example, they had themselves joined in the work, labouring as hard as any. The heat, the roar of the fire, the pressure of the excited mob were too much for Publius; he collapsed and had to be carried away. The physician pronounced that his heart was weak, that he must rest completely for a long time and must never resume his hard labour in the fields. 'If he did he would pay for it, I am sure,' wrote Caecilia. 'I'm afraid that he will feel this very much; he really did enjoy the life, hard though it was, but I'm sure he will be glad to stop reading all those books on agriculture and get back to his "men of letters". I think he'll soon be content again.'

Pericles, who had a personal letter from Publius about it, said that, in his opinion, his master was content already. 'He's doing,' said Pericles, 'what wise Horace recommended, and what could be better? Listen to this from the Master's letter —

'I do not know what may now be in store for me but in that there is nothing to dismay. All the more because I do not know what to-morrow may bring I feel that I must be kindly and just to-day, considerate to those whom I have it in my power to hurt, ready to bear whatever may befall. I will not be beaten by my fate. I will be master till the last day comes. What does our Horace recommend to you and me who love him? "Hither bid wines be brought and perfumes and the short-lived flowers of the lovely rose while business and age and the dark threads of the three Sisters still allow. Fear not, be calm, be generous, and — Carpe Diem, pluck the day's fruits while you may".'

'Dear father,' said Metella, 'he makes a courageous show.'

'No show, madam!' Pericles was greatly moved. 'He is unconquerable!'

'Let us drink to his health and long life,' cried Lucius, and they drank to Publius.

Soon afterwards came a letter from Lollia Claudia, who said

that Publius was getting much satisfaction out of being an invalid. He used the weakness of his heart quite shamelessly as a means of avoiding what he did not want to do, but at the same time he was doing far too much. In her opinion he spent too much time in reading and writing and too little on the wines and perfumes he talked so much about. Why didn't he imitate 'old Horace' as well as quote him? Still, he was happy; to him life had always been an exciting game and so it would be to the end. She had heard, by the way, from Claudia Procula. Procula said that Pilate was grumbling frightfully about Vitellius's instructions, but supposed that he must obey them even if they were, as he knew them to be, thoroughly misguided. 'He is making all sorts of good resolutions,' wrote Procula, 'but I shouldn't be surprised if, when the Jews do something which he regards as endangering the State, he throws all his resolutions to the winds. You know he really does understand the Jews and Vitellius does not.'

One late afternoon in the summer Lucius, having finished his day's work with Vitellius, was about to leave the Palace when he was told that four Jews, just come from Judaea, were begging urgently to see the Governor. They had refused to state their business except to Vitellius himself or to his personal representative; it was a matter of life or death, they said; they would refuse to go away from the Palace without fulfilling their mission; the future of the Jewish people, the peace of Judaea, the security of Rome were at stake. Lucius, being told all this by a contemptuous secretary, who remarked that it was a pity the Jews were so excitable, went to see the strangers. He found them dust-stained and weary with their journey. Two of them were grey-headed old men, but all four of them were full of spirit, alert and earnest, when they began to speak. They had travelled by land from Jerusalem, never resting, using camels, asses, mules and any transport they could find. They were, in fact, though they did not mention this, determined to be first with their story whatever happened. They said that they had the gravest possible charge to lay before the Governor against Pilate. They would tell Lucius this much, that Pilate had brutally attacked the people of Samaria when they were engaged on an excursion which, even if mistaken in its aim, was prompted only by religious enthusiasm. Pilate had turned his soldiers loose on them; he had

slain masses of them; he had executed prisoners. Let Lucius tell Vitellius, let the Governor see them, let him grant them Roman justice for the unprovoked barbarity, the worst of the many which Pilate had committed.

Vitellius had the Jews brought in. He asked them whom they represented. They said that the leaders of the community had sent them post-haste because they feared that Pilate would accuse them untruthfully to the Governor. They knew how highly the Governor estimated Justice, how impartially he practised it, how sincerely he desired it for the Jews who, through no fault of their own, had so few friends.

The Governor gravely assented. 'Be assured,' he said, 'You shall have Justice. That is what Caesar orders. That is what I am here to give to all men, including the Jews, whose nation I have always respected. What is your complaint?'

They told their story, adding that a more formal deputation would shortly arrive to amplify it. They would tell the bare facts.

A preacher had lately appeared in Samaria, the central tract of Judaea. The Governor would know that this was not unusual. There were many such men, enthusiasts, ascetics and prophets, most of them harmless though occasionally, they conceded, there might be one wilder than the rest who threatened trouble. In this case there was no question of such risk. The preacher had summoned the people of the countryside to meet him in great numbers at Shechem, the ancient capital of the Jews. There they would ascend Mount Gerizim, the mountain just south of Shechem, and he would show them where their great national leader Moses had buried the sacred vessels of their religion.

'Had he buried them?' asked Vitellius. 'I should rather have expected' — with an air of amusement — 'that if he had, someone would have dug them up long ago.'

The deputation explained that Moses had never been near Gerizim, so he had never buried treasures there. He had never even crossed the Jordan. He had only stood on the far side and looked across at the 'Promised Land', then he had died. This preacher was a fanatic seeking fame as a religious leader. Probably he, himself, had buried some spurious treasures on the mountain in order that, at the appropriate moment, he might produce them to the crowd, hoping that they would accept him

as their spiritual leader. It was an old trick; many a man in the East had 'discovered' sacred relics in order to acquire sanctity. There was nothing threatening about it, nothing seditious, nothing that need have involved the Roman authorities.

'About this preacher —' said Vitellius, 'did he talk about Roman rule or the Emperor or the Procurator Pilate or the future of the Jews?'

'No, they said, 'only about Moses and the treasures.'

'This Moses,' said Vitellius, 'he was some time back?'

'Hundreds and hundreds of years ago,' they said.

'Was the crowd armed?' asked Vitellius.

'No,' said the deputation, 'certainly not. As your Excellency knows, in the present disturbed times citizens sometimes have to carry arms in the countryside, but that is an individual act; it is solely for protection against robbers, who are, alas, numerous under Pontius Pilate.'

'Well, what happened?' said the Governor.

'The people,' answered the Jews, 'were on their way to Gerizim with the preacher at their head. Many of them had wives and children with them as though for a festival; they were innocently elated, rejoicing that they were about to see the sacred treasures. They were full of goodwill to all men. In their happiness they chanted words from the last songs that Moses sang just before he died. It was natural, surely, to choose the songs of Moses since he was supposed to have buried the vessels. His Excellency might not know these words but the beginning was famous among the Jews —

'Give ear, O ye Heavens, and I will speak;

And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain,

My speech shall distil as the dew,

As the small rain upon the tender herb,

And as the showers upon the grass.'

Nothing, said the deputation, could be more peaceful, more friendly, more conclusive of the pure intentions of the worshippers, for that was what they were. Their thought dwelt only on their god; their language was taken from that kindly side of Nature which was so precious to them in their barren mountains. These

were the words, the outpouring, of humble, innocent hearts, when mounted ruffians, sent by Pilate —

‘Do you mean Roman soldiers?’ asked Vitellius somewhat coldly.

The deputation could hardly believe that they were Romans so brutal were they, but unfortunately the evidence could not be denied. These men burst suddenly upon the peaceful crowd. Hundreds were killed. ‘Thousands! Thousands!’ one of the four insisted. There was no struggle, no fighting, for the Jews were defenceless. Some were trampled under the feet of the horses, the remainder were driven back in confusion. There was a panic, but that was not the worst. The soldiers took many prisoners and Pilate had a number of them — any who were thought to have taken the lead — summarily executed. Therefore, they demanded justice against Pilate himself. They trusted Vitellius completely, but they felt bound to tell him that unless such barbarity was punished they could not answer for the consequences. They did not appeal to the Governor’s generosity, though he was generous, but to his sense of justice. They would be happy if he would, himself, take over the government of Palestine.

Vitellius told them to return as soon as they had rested. They could tell their countrymen that justice would be done. Before, however, he took any action he must await the more formal deputation that they said was coming. He must also, of course, communicate with the Procurator Pilate. When he had both sides of the question before him they would learn of his decision. He gave instructions that the four Jews were to be handsomely treated while they were in Antioch.

Then Vitellius sent Lucius to Caesarea, the seat of Pilate’s government. Lucius was to inform Pilate of the complaints against him and bring back his reply; he was instructed to present to Pilate a letter in which Vitellius said —

‘You will remember our conversations about the handling of the Jews. You must, therefore, regard the charge now made against you as serious, but I assume nothing until I have heard from you. I sincerely hope — indeed I am sure — that your explanation will be satisfactory to me.’

Pilate smiled broadly when he heard from Lucius the account

which the deputation had given to Vitellius. 'They see in this,' he said, 'a chance of getting rid of me at last. The weakness of the central government about Judaea is such that they may succeed. If they do, you are so much farther towards war with the Jews. Every time you yield they will press you farther until at last you can give way no more and then the great explosion comes. Now I will prepare my report. I have been working on it. I heard that the deputation had gone, so that I knew a reply would be demanded of me, though it should not have been. And there's another more imposing deputation getting ready now. I'm told that its story is going to be that the crowd collected at the old capital in order to escape for a time from the terrorism of the brutal Procurator; anywhere for safety, I suppose, and best of all on the sacred mountain Gerizim and its fellow Ebal just to the north of it. I'll let you have my dispatch to-morrow, though I doubt whether Vitellius wants any report from me that will put his pets in the wrong.'

On the next day Pilate sent for Lucius. 'Here it is,' he said, indicating his dispatch. 'Would you like to hear it — the short and honest testimony of the man on the spot, who will, I fear, pay dearly for it.' He laughed quietly and began to read —

'Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judaea, to Lucius Vitellius, Governor of Syria.

I would have written to you at once, my dear Vitellius, had I not regarded the recent incident in Samaria as satisfactorily closed. As it was, I decided that it would be sufficient to include it in my routine report rather than to trouble you specially at a time when I know you to be deeply occupied with affairs of real importance. Hearing, however, from Lucius Paetus, who, as I desire you to know, has faithfully reported your wishes to me, that a deputation of Jews has already given you a version of the facts which I can only describe as thoroughly dishonest, and knowing, as I do, that a second and more formal deputation will shortly be on its way to Antioch with more elaborate dishonesties, I hasten to explain to you what happened. I know you will pardon me if I am brief, for I, like yourself, though in a much humbler part, am military commander as well as political chief.

Six weeks ago I heard that a fanatical preacher was going up and down in Samaria, now in the hills, now in the Jordan Valley, now in the plains to the north, telling everyone that he had seen in a vision the precise place on Mount Gerizim where Moses had hidden the sacred vessels of the Jewish religion. He summoned them to accompany him to the mountain on a certain day, when he would unearth the treasures in sight of them all. I had to ask myself certain questions. Why display the treasures? Why summon this excitable, defiant people to assemble in their thousands at the scene? What was it intended that they should do with the vessels? What was it intended that they should do *with themselves*?

Moses, you must know, is their great national leader. They revere him next to their god; they say he rescued them from captivity in Egypt and brought them to the crossing of the Jordan, though he never crossed himself. But that does not matter; the point is that it was round the name of Moses and the supposed sacred treasures that they were called to rally. It was a national, patriotic movement this man was organizing. I have had much experience of such movements. I know how they begin and where they end.

This Gerizim is a sacred mountain of the Jews. A few miles north of it is another mountain which is slightly higher. It is called Ebal. Between the two lies Shechem, the ancient capital of the Jews, the reputed scene of some of the most famous episodes in their early history. The demonstrators were not merely appealing to the memory of the patriot Moses; they intended to occupy one of the two mountains which guard the ancient capital. I had to consider whether they did not mean to occupy the other mountain also and then, by force of arms, the capital itself. This would have been a most serious event. The Shechem area, dominated by the two mountains, is from the military point of view the most important in Palestine. It is only eighteen miles from the crossing of the Jordan and only thirty from Jerusalem, the sacred city, from Caesarea, the seat of my administration, and from Joppa, the port. It stands at the junction of the most important roads to Caesarea and the Galilean Lake, to Jerusalem and Joppa, and to the Jordan. The pass between

Gerizim and Ebal is the only way through the central mountains of Judaea. If it was denied to us, if the roads were cut at Shechem, we should have no passage through the country except by the road on the coast and the roads in the Jordan Valley, both running directly north and south; we should be cut off from all the mountainous country and should have to conquer Judaea afresh.

I was soon informed that this great body of demonstrators, who had come from far and near, were fully armed. The preacher had sent word everywhere that they must bring arms with them. You are aware, because I myself mentioned it to you, that Judaea is full of concealed arms. Every rebel leader can draw on them; that is every preacher, for usually they are the same thing. I was, and I am, convinced that nothing less was afoot than a deliberate attempt at revolution. It would have broken out openly as soon as the mob had been sufficiently stimulated by the sight of the "treasures" on Mount Gerizim. My scouts informed me that for days before the final march seditious cries and songs had been heard in the villages and that on the last day, the crowd, as they marched, were chanting passages from the songs supposed to have been uttered by this Moses just before he died. I have the most precise evidence. You will not, of course, be familiar with the words, and neither was I, but I am informed that one piece which they sang with special gusto was this. (The person supposed to be speaking is their god.)

"I will heap mischiefs upon them; I will spend mine arrows upon them.

They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction. I will also send the teeth of beasts upon them, with the poison of serpents of the dust. The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the young man and the virgin; the suckling also with the man of grey hair."

There was another choice bit—

"I will render vengeance to my enemies, and will reward them that hate me.

I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives; from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy."

All this, I submit, was openly seditious as well as blood-thirsty. It was for us, the Romans, and for none other, that they designed these pleasant experiences.

Some of the worst of them even had their wives and children with them. They were not going to leave them behind to fall into our hands. They were taking them to the camp which they meant to fortify. It is my belief that had they occupied Gerizim, the whole country would have been aflame in a few hours. My 3000 soldiers would have been overwhelmed. I had to decide on the instant and it was clear to me that I should take no risks. I attacked them on their actual march to the mountain. They were taken completely by surprise. I think that their earlier successes in resisting me had persuaded them that I would not dare to oppose them now, and that if I did, I would not be supported by my superiors. Under my attack they dispersed in confusion. Some were killed in the fighting, many were captured and those whom I found to have been ringleaders I executed, though many who deserved death escaped. Order is restored, and there is no reason why it should be disturbed for a long time provided that the Jews are made to understand that my action is fully approved both in Antioch and in Rome.

Otherwise I must most respectfully warn you, as I have already said in Antioch, that the Jews will become intolerable and, especially if there should come Procurators less just than I, open war will be inevitable. The Jews, I know, regard this as a test case.'

'It is a test case,' said Vitellius when he had studied the report. He had heard the second delegation, which brought with it a lengthy indictment of Pilate's misdeeds during his administration. 'What do you think about it?' he asked Lucius, whose cool judgment he appreciated.

'I wonder,' said Lucius, 'what I should have done in his case.'

Perhaps gone to see for myself. I think Pilate was in a tight corner. If he had done nothing and they had risen, what would have been said of him in Antioch and in Rome? I think he would have been condemned.'

'In Rome,' said Vitellius equably, 'they would have said that he had provoked the rising by maladroit administration, and in Antioch they would have agreed with Rome. I mean that I would have agreed. And that's really what it comes to. It doesn't matter so much whether this particular demonstration was a revolt, a religious exercise, or an outing. The Procurator may have been right or he may have been wrong. My feeling is that he has made himself impossible. He takes the worst view of everything that they do and, to them, whatever he does is deliberate malice. It's hopeless. In any event he need not have been so impetuous. He could have sent a personal representative to find out what they were really after, and he could have given them a warning first, but he doesn't believe in warnings — that's what is wrong with him. What's more, he should at once have summoned the chief priests and their Council at Jerusalem to intervene. They could have been on the spot in a few hours and no one would have been more anxious than they to stop the trouble early, for their game is to work with us so as to keep themselves in power. And our policy is to work with them so as to avoid a revolt. Well, I'm afraid he's got to go. He'll have to return to Rome and appear before Caesar's tribunal. I'm afraid, my dear Lucius, you'll have to be off again to Caesarea. You must tell the Procurator that he is removed, that I am sending a temporary substitute and that he is to return to Rome under your escort by the first available ship.'

Pilate received the news with composure. 'Procula will be pleased,' he said, 'and I would be pleased myself if I thought that my policy would be confirmed in Rome. I'm afraid, however, that it will be condemned, which means the end of me, a small matter, and the end of such poor peace as Judaea has had during my term of office. Well, the sooner we get back to Rome the better.'

The autumn was so far advanced and the weather was so bad that there were no more sailings to Italy. Vitellius instructed Pilate to leave Judaea and live in Syria in any town he chose

other than Antioch. It was early in the following March — in the year 37 by the Christian reckoning — when at last Lucius, having Pilate in his charge, set off, accompanied by his family, from Seleucia. Their ship was sailing to Alexandria by way of the coastal ports. At Alexandria they were to take the first boat they could catch for Italy.

For some time before they started Pilate and Lucius watched the scene as the last pieces of the cargo were loaded and the last passengers came on board.

They stood on the raised part of the deck which was reserved for the more important passengers. They were facing towards the bows and were looking directly down on the crowd of humbler folk below them. As the ship left there was shouting and waving of farewells to the people on the quay. They made for the mouth of the river, the noise died away and the ship settled down to routine. Some time afterwards Pilate heard voices raised in argument. He touched Lucius's arm and pointed. A group of men were talking excitedly. At the centre, arguing with two of them, was a tall, swarthy man. He was thin and bony but broad-shouldered, with a sharp hatchet face, and thick, untidy black hair. He was insistent, overbearing, with quick, impulsive movements. He talked rapidly, and as he addressed himself to the two men, he thrust his face into each of theirs in turn as though demanding their immediate submission to what he was saying. When they shook their heads he seized them playfully (and yet it was not so playfully) by the nape of the neck and made as though he would knock their heads together. Then, letting them go, he clapped them on the back, laughed, took them by the shoulder and started to harangue them and others who gathered round. His face was lit with energy. His words poured out in a confident stream. He would take no denial.

Pilate was both pleased and derisive. 'Jews!' he said. 'Watch, Lucius Paetus. Brówbeating one another, on sea as on land. Their national occupation.'

'But look at the man in the middle,' objected Lucius. 'See how they listen to him. Some jeer, but they listen. He makes them. Perhaps one of your dangerous preachers, do you think?'

'He might be. What's more' — Pilate frowned, trying to

recapture some memory — 'I've seen him somewhere.' He beckoned to his secretary, who was standing behind. 'Alexander!' He pointed to the man below — 'Who's that?'

Alexander looked. 'Why, you know, sir. The chief follower of that rebel you executed, Jesus — and now himself the leader. He's called Peter.'

'Oh, to be sure.' Pilate nodded with satisfaction. 'Jesus was a preacher, the fanatic at Gerizim was a preacher, this man is a preacher. They're all rebels. What's he talking about, Alexander? You know the language.'

'I can't hear, sir! Some are applauding and some protesting. It drowns his voice. But he's annoyed with someone.'

'With fellow-Jews, then. If it was with us, they'd all be applauding. Go and listen.'

In a few minutes Alexander returned. 'Yes, it's Peter. He's been collecting followers — these so-called Christians — in the north and also money. He's taking it to Jerusalem.'

Pilate gave a short laugh. 'You see, Lucius Paetus. Money! Money for rebels! Money *from* rebels *for* rebels! And we do nothing.'

Alexander resumed. 'He's getting off at Joppa. He's cross about another Jew, also a follower of Jesus, who's collecting a party of his own. Someone called Saul.'

'Who?' asked Lucius. 'Did you say Paul?'

'Saul,' said Alexander.

'There was a queer fellow' called Paul when I was at Damascus. The Prefect told me about him. He had been fighting the faction which supported this Jesus and then, they thought, he changed sides.'

'He wouldn't mind,' said Pilate, 'provided there was still fighting.'

Alexander spoke indifferently. 'It might be anyone. The name's common. At any rate Peter is now complaining about one Saul. He says that Saul never himself knew the leader Jesus nor got any directions from him, whereas he himself, and his friends, were with Jesus from first to last and therefore are the only people with any right to speak for him.'

'Speak for him!' Pilate was contemptuous. 'Rome should speak to them.'

'Well, Rome will have the chance.' There was a touch of malice about Alexander. 'He's going there.'

'Who's going where?'

'Peter — down there — says that he's going to Rome. Some day.'

Pilate snorted with indignation. 'The absurd thing is that this new creed never ought to have got a start. Actually, I went to some trouble to prevent it. Did I tell you about that at Antioch? No, I don't think I did. It's an odd business. The rebel Jesus wanted to make himself king, of course, but besides that there were reports that he was a magician. It was said that he had vanished from one place and appeared at the same moment elsewhere. There were rumours about his changing one thing into another. You know the sort of story. At the finish, when he was in Jerusalem, he threatened, so they told me, to destroy their temple and in three days build it up again. They certainly made out that they were afraid of the first part of it. Well, any Jew executed by the Romans is likely to become a hero to his fellow countrymen. I suspected that in the night some of his band would steal his body and make a hero of him. And then the priests would have blamed me — reported the negligent Procurator to Rome. I know them. So I decided to outwit the rebels. Very simple, I thought. After I had had a word with the priests — to bring them into it — I gave orders for the body to be removed by night. Clever, wasn't it, Lucius Paetus?'

Something in his tone warned Lucius. 'Did you outwit them, then?'

'No. Something quite unexpected happened. When they found the tomb empty they simply announced that Jesus had come to life again and disappeared.'

'Who started the story?' asked Metella. 'Peter?'

'No, my dear lady, and you ought to be able to guess. Who crowd the temples, all the temples, any temple? Who support the religions from the East that invade Rome? Who maintain the swarming priests? Who cause the constant scandals in this and that religion?' He smiled amicably on Metella.

'You mean women,' she said, 'but you know very well that there would never be a scandal if a man wasn't in it. It was women, then?'

'It was. Some women followers of Jesus came to the tomb next day. They found it empty. They suffered, I don't doubt, a pretty shock. Then one of them cried out that since he was not there he was not dead, he must be alive again, he was alive again. The story spread and, believe me, in no time at all he had been seen now here, now there, you might say everywhere. Now you can't stop it.'

'Rome can stop it.' Lucius was curt.

'But Rome likes new religions,' objected Metella. 'Especially from the East.'

'Not if they threaten Rome herself,' said Lucius. 'And this growing trouble' — he turned to Pilate — 'is due, you say, to a misunderstanding?'

'Yes.'

'A genuine misunderstanding?'

'Oh, certainly. Why not?' Pilate smiled at Lucius's dubious, frowning face. 'My dear Lucius Paetus, you believe, don't you, in your household gods at home, in the divinities of the fields and springs and crops?'

'I do.'

'And what about the marvellous adventures, the strange deeds and misdeeds of the Olympian divinities?'

'The gods, mark you,' put in Metella, 'as well as the goddesses.'

'Stories for children,' pronounced Lucius. 'Beautiful or ugly.'

'And all the other faiths and rituals, Lucius Paetus, grave or gay, lovely or unlovely, which Rome discovers wherever she goes? What of them?'

'They are impostures.'

'But how did they start?'

Lucius shrugged his shoulders. 'How should I know? Someone, I suppose, away in the past, exaggerated or distorted, embroidered or plainly just invented.'

'Or, perhaps, to start with, someone misunderstood? That's what I had in mind. A fascinating subject, Lucius Paetus. I fancy that I shall have leisure to study it when Caesar has done with me.'

Peter left the ship at Joppa. He was almost the first ashore, gaily greeting those who met him and crying warm farewells to his friends who remained on board. An affectionate crowd

followed him, pushing each other aside to carry the bundles that were his baggage.

'Look!' said Lucius to Pilate. 'He is already somebody. He has a way with him.'

Pilate nodded agreeably. 'I would have a way with him if I were still Procurator. I am a man, Lucius Paetus, of lost opportunities.'

At Alexandria they found a ship about to leave for Italy. The importance of Lucius's mission secured berths for them and they left at once. As they approached Sicily a ship going the other way signalled them. Coming close, its Captain threw aboard a message, at the same time shouting the news. Tiberius was dead and Gaius Caligula, not yet twenty-five years old, ruled in his stead. It was late March, in the year 37 of the Christian reckoning.

PART THREE

*

CHAPTER I

AND now Rome breathed again. Few regretted the efficient, morose old man who so disliked the sight of Rome and the people that, when once he had put them behind him, he never visited them again. The leaders of the State, the Knights, the rich men no longer feared the arrival of a messenger from Capreae. The Senate had not to sit perplexed lest, misinterpreting Caesar's letter, it should incur his anger. Some Senators wondered whether Rome might regain her liberties now that the family tyrants, the veteran dynasts, Augustus and Tiberius, were both dead and no one so expert in tyranny survived to take their place. The common people desired a ruler whom they could see, admire, applaud. They welcomed a man who would give them more presents and more Games. They had had enough of a prince who despised both the public shows and the populace who enjoyed them.

Above all, there was the feeling in every heart that the day of age was over and that of youth had come. There had been too much of chilling restraint, hardness and discipline. Now was the time for youth, with its hot blood, its dreams and dalliance: youth expansive, lighthearted, even frivolous. Better the errors of boyish impulse than the crimes of murderous, calculating age. Nor would Gaius, said public men and private gossips, be irresponsible or arbitrary in conduct. He had lived in the shadow of terror, so he would be merciful. He had feared the unknown, so he would himself be candid. He must have learned through bitter schooling the virtues of toleration. All the reports from Capreae promised it. Gaius wanted reconciliation. Gaius nursed no grievances. Gaius was resolved to have no enemies. Gaius was open-handed. Gaius loved the Roman people, so the people would love Gaius. Shouting 'Tiberius to the Tiber!' as though he was an executed criminal, and 'Tiberius Biberius',

Tiberius the Tippler, they saluted the new resplendent sun, the almost God, Gaius Caligula. Death, in bursting Gaius's bonds, had burst theirs too. The Golden Age had come.

Among the tributes offered to Gaius many took the form of verse. Some of his admirers wrote poems, others only quoted them, some brought out verses written long before, making the necessary alterations. There were those who found that they needed to change the dedication only. One rich Knight (whose poem, intended for Tiberius, had been composed by a Greek slave), had only to make verbal changes. It ran —

'The Virtues, when they sought a Saviour for our Rome,
Found in revered Tiberius a sure home.'

It sounded just as aptly when the Virtues 'found in the youthful Gaius' the same home. The poem which was most freely drawn on by the Courtiers was Virgil's Eclogue on the coming of the Golden Age. The booksellers reported a great run on Virgil at this time. Gaius, who the sycophants alleged read all these eulogies personally, must have been impressed to find himself repeatedly assured, in Virgil's words, that the great line of the centuries had now begun anew, that a golden race was about to spring up throughout the world, that the earth untilled would pour forth her gifts, wild brambles bear the purple grapes, and rams and lambs grow spontaneous fleeces of yellow or scarlet wool. Laudatory use was also made of the famous Hymn which Horace wrote in the days of Augustus, the *Carmen Saeculare*, but more sparingly, since there were things in it which a suspicious prince might take amiss, and, after all, in these early days it was as well to be prudent. The Emperor's secretaries worked hard. The great majority of the senders received replies saying that the Emperor thanked them, having read their tribute with great interest. A small section received a letter, somewhat warmer, written by a secretary and signed by Gaius. To a few he wrote in his own hand. These were the leading Senators, Generals and Knights. There was great disappointment among the members of this distinguished class who only received a note signed by a secretary. Had Tiberius been concerned there would also have been fear lest something had offended him, but those who were disappointed, bearing in mind Gaius's frank and open

mind, only blamed the secretaries for their carelessness. Sextus Cornelius was one of these. He had lost no time in sending his congratulations, introducing a few appropriate phrases, as he thought, from Horace's Hymn.

One of the first reports to reach Rome, arriving in front of Gaius himself, was that he intended to revise the unpopular acts of Tiberius. He would recall the exiles. He would not pursue the quarrel against the relatives and partisans of Sejanus. He would begin with a clean slate, wiping out all the ugly blots caused by the last years of Tiberius. Sextus Cornelius and his son Aulus would therefore be returning before long. This was the situation which Publius Antonius and Caecilia presented to Lucius and Metella when, with the young Publius, now four years old, and the two slaves, they arrived back in Rome. Publius announced a family conference which Lollia Claudia — for was not Gaius also a Claudian? — must attend. But first he had a word with Pericles. He had welcomed him most warmly, felicitating him on bringing the party back safely from their far wanderings.

'I knew you would,' he said. 'I doubt whether anyone else could do it, but I had faith in you. I felt about you as Diomedes of the loud war-cry felt about Ulysses, that you would bring back your companions even from burning fire, so much do you excel in understanding.'

'It is the first time,' said Pericles, 'that anyone has compared me with Ulysses, the crafty man of many devices. It is a great compliment. I hope that you are right, sir. All the time that I have been away I have tried hard to be more and more suspicious.'

'Doubt is the beginning of wisdom, Pericles. Cultivate it well, cling to it jealously. Take me for your model.'

'Yes, sir. I suspect at this moment that Aulus Cornelius and his father will soon be recalled from exile. Everyone thinks so. Then what are we to do?'

Publius replied gravely. 'There are two things that I can do. One indeed I have already done. I have written a poem, quite short, hailing Gaius as the creator of a new Golden Age. It may not be as good as Virgil but the thoughts and language are my own. I think Caesar will be pleased.'

'Do you suppose, sir, that Sextus Cornelius also will have offered a poem of his own?'

Publius exploded. 'He write a poem! Why if he tried to set foot on Parnassus, the Muses would drive him out with their little pitchforks. Can you guess who wrote that, my fine man?'

'Catullus, sir.'

'You know everything, don't you? But that was an easy one. You remember the verses that I sent to Metella for you to identify?'

Snow and the sharp-toothed wind confine him, happily lazy,
There with wife and books, old friends and new, by the
fireside.

Did you think that they were written by Horace?'

'No, sir. I only thought that they were worthy of Horace.'

'Ah,' said Publius, much pleased. 'Did you really think so? That is a great compliment.' Something seemed to strike him and he looked hard at Pericles. 'Why, that's what you said when I compared you with Ulysses.' He laughed with enjoyment. 'I believe you're playing a game with me. If you're a Ulysses I'm a Horace, isn't that it?' They laughed together.

'At any rate,' said Publius, 'the poem which I've just sent to the Emperor is much better. But I've another idea. It is to go direct to Gaius, to explain to him about Lucius and Metella — about why she married him, I mean — and to beg him, if any of us is to be punished, to inflict the punishment on me and me alone.'

'He might listen, sir. He is a gracious, pleasant-spoken prince.'

'How do you know? You've never met him, have you, my clever Ulysses?'

'Yes, sir, in a boat, when we were near Capreae. He made too much of it. I merely stopped him from falling into the water and he said that I had saved his life.'

'Hush, my good fellow, hush! Tell no one about that. Never let it be whispered. No Claudian would ever forgive a slave for having saved his life, and this Claudian is already Caesar and may someday' — Publius pointed slyly upwards — 'be a god. Forget it, Pericles, I beg, I order you.'

'I have never mentioned it, sir, I assure you. It was a small

matter. But would it not be well to wait some time before you explain everything to Caesar — in order to see how things turn out? He may make it plain before long that our enemies have nothing to hope from him.'

'Or he may not. And I don't want to wait. That heart attack — you heard of it? — though really these women always exaggerate, and they make me take the most absurd care of myself. Getting up late and going to bed early and not even reading when and as long as I want to, because they say, oh yes, believe me they do — that reading is an effort, reading is a strain, reading exhausts one, but all the same' — Publius paused to consider where he had got to in his harangue — 'all the same, it was a warning to me, and though I never felt better I would like to get this question of their future — Metella's and Lucius's — settled once and for all. Then, if something happens to me, well, so it is. I shall have had my family, my friends, chief of whom is Pericles, my public life. I shall have had my books, through whom I have been companion with the great men of the past. So if death comes it comes, and I have no complaint against either gods or men. But there's another matter that my collapse recalled to me. I had never taken steps to free you at my death, though I had long intended to. I realize that I must not postpone it any longer. So I am now going to put that in train without delay.'

'Thank you, sir, indeed.'

'You are sure you don't want to be freed while I am still alive, Pericles? I like to think that during my life you are content to be as you are and my friend.'

'I am content, sir.'

A short time afterwards Iris went to see a fellow-slave in the household of Aelia Memmia. Aelia had taken risks since Sejanus's death. She had obstinately maintained old friendships; she had spoken her mind freely. Presently Iris was told that Aelia wanted to speak to her. Her coming had been reported by the steward. She went at once. Aelia had several female slaves with her whom she did not trouble to send away. She was as composed as ever but harder, Iris thought, and soured. She asked when they had got back from Syria, how old Young Publius was and whether Metella was well. 'I hope you yourself behave better than when

you were with me,' she said. 'If I remember rightly, you were nearly sold.'

'I believe I satisfy my mistress,' said Iris. 'That is enough for me.'

'I have a message for your mistress,' went on Aelia. 'That is why I have sent for you. Tell her that if all goes well, my son and my husband will be back in Rome before long. Tell her that the Emperor is getting the usual reports on them before he definitely decides, but there will be no difficulty — and in a few weeks everything should be settled. My son and my husband will meet at Alexandria and come home together. I expect that they will land at Rhegium or Puteoli about the end of July. I shall go down to meet them at the port. Your mistress can come to call on me at any time if she desires to discuss her plans. Fortunately it is a simple matter.'

'What is?' asked Iris bluntly, her colour rising.

'Her marrying my son Aulus,' said Aelia. She checked Iris, who was about to retort, with a curt gesture. 'Give your mistress my message and say that Publius Antonius will hear formally from Sextus Cornelius as soon as he is back.'

'My mistress will not leave her husband,' said Iris, throwing away caution, 'nor marry Aulus Cornelius. She would sooner die.'

'If you are insolent,' was the reply, 'I shall be tempted to forget that you are not at present my slave. You would do well to behave yourself since you will return here with your mistress when she comes as my son's wife. You can go.'

Iris delivered her message. It was reported to the family conference at which Lollia was present. Everyone was for caution except Publius, who said that since it was he who had brought the original trouble on the family by promising to marry Metella to Aulus he ought to be allowed to take on himself the whole of the risk whatever it might be.

'Nonsense!' said Lollia scornfully. 'All this is too soon. We know nothing about the new Caesar, except what I know, being a Claudian. He'll be contrary. If you let him alone he'll very likely take a great fancy to Lucius and make him Consul or Prefect of the Praetorian Guard, but if Publius Antonius goes confessing to him about the great plot to profit by Sejanus's elevation he may have the whole family executed except Metella, whom

he'll marry at once to Aulus Cornelius. Or perhaps he'll keep her for himself. My advice is, let things alone. Keep a sharp eye on the two Cornelii when they return so that you'll know what mischief they are planning, but wait for them to make a move. If Caesar takes a dislike to them all will be well. If they begin to get a hold on him we'll try to circumvent them. In the meantime let Publius wait on Gaius along with all the other Senators and present Lucius Paetus to him. We shall see how he treats them, especially Lucius.'

So one morning, when Gaius was receiving Senators and Knights, Publius took Lucius with him. Gaius's three sisters, Drusilla, who had been with him at Surrentum, Agrippina and Julia were all there. Drusilla sat in a chair close to Gaius and Lucius noted that he turned to her occasionally for support as he had done before. Gaius recognized Lucius at once, greeted him pleasantly and asked after his wife. 'I remember,' he said, 'she didn't come to see me at Capreae when I asked her.' He made a jest of it, but Lucius could not be sure whether his light tone, especially when he said 'I've a good memory', might not conceal resentment.

'We were very sorry not to come,' said Lucius. 'We felt we had to get away from there, we couldn't stay longer; there was something rather terrible.' He had wondered whether Gaius would refer to that day, and he had tried to prepare something to say, but now he stopped, embarrassed and confused.

'Something terrible?' asked Gaius, as though puzzled. 'I don't remember anything terrible. Oh, you mean that fool of a poet? You tried to save him, didn't you? The worst and the most dangerous poet I ever knew, for he killed a man — himself.' He laughed at his own joke, with a guffaw that had a certain wildness in it. 'He's not changed since Surrentum,' thought Lucius. 'He's still afraid of something.' Drusilla leaned forward, touched Gaius's arm and smiled at him. He became calmer. 'You remember, sister,' he said, 'how frightened we were when the poet began to talk treason, lest it should get across to Capreae and we be blamed.' Drusilla nodded. 'Very different days!' said Gaius. 'No need for us to fear anything now. Other people can be frightened of us now. I was scared of that poet, too. I had to put Cassius Chaerea on to him. He's a fine fellow, Cas-

sus.' He laughed noisily again but was pleasant when he bade Lucius good-bye. 'Don't forget,' he said, 'to present my admiration to your charming wife and, by the way' — he patted Lucius gently on the shoulder — 'look out for yourself, my friend. I am making myself popular by forgiving everybody. Caesar is merciful and the people love him. The exiles are flocking back. The islands will soon be empty, and your rival will soon be here. He tells me he's very much in love, and I'm sure I don't wonder.'

'I don't quite know what to make of him,' said Lucius in reporting this reception to the family council. 'I'm sure he wants to be liked. He's trying to make himself in every way a contrast to Tiberius. But he's uneasy still. He has that queer, nervous laugh, he's telling himself that nowadays he has nothing to fear, and he's beginning to realize that he can make everyone else fear him. I suppose it's all quite natural after what he's gone through. He was certainly pleasant to me.' He addressed Publius. 'What did you think of him, sir?'

'When you have had my experience, my boy, you will always be suspicious. Trust no one, except, of course, your wife, and your wife's mother, and then there's me and Pericles, and one or two more. That's a good general rule. But it is possible sometimes to carry suspicion too far. Gaius — I'm sure of this, for I watched him very closely — is sound at heart. He may not be intellectual — the Claudians rarely are —'

'Sir!' protested Lollia.

'You know they're not, Lollia. You, of course, are highly intellectual' — Lollia made a face at him — 'but most of them are all pride and obstinacy. I am convinced, however, that Gaius is simple and sincere, a genuine father of his country, kindly and unspoilt in mind.'

'Bless your innocent heart!' said Lollia. 'The only thing to do is to take no notice of you. Now let us decide how to keep a watch for the return of these two enemies. We can find out by what ship they are leaving Alexandria and get word in advance.' So Publius sent letters to his friend Strabo by the first ship sailing to Alexandria. He received a reply that places had been taken for Sextus Cornelius and Aulus on a big vessel leaving Alexandria for Puteoli in the second week of July. It arrived during the last week of the month. Pericles was at Puteoli to await it, watched father

and son disembark, and set out before them for Rome. Late one morning it was reported that the exiles had arrived home. They had come with others who had been released from banishment. Some miles outside the city gates they had been welcomed by their friends and triumphantly escorted home. The reception of each new arrival in these months confirmed the reputation which Gaius was already winning by his lavish gifts of cash, food and Games.

In the late afternoon, after dinner was over, they were all except Caecilia sitting in the garden wondering what the next step would be. They had had their worries in the last six years, but at least Patmos and Cyprus had been comfortably far off. Now again uncertainty was their companion. It would be tolerable if Caesar were friendly to them or even indifferent, but what if he were not? Suddenly the voice of Caecilia was heard in the house and coming nearer. She was speaking more loudly than usual, in order to give warning to the family in the garden. 'Come straight through, Aulus,' she was saying. 'They will be delighted to see you.' She appeared in the doorway, with Aulus behind her. 'Here's Aulus Cornelius,' she said. 'He only arrived this morning and he's come at once to see us. How is your father, Aulus?'

They rose to meet him, a little mechanically as though this was, after all, what they had all been expecting and must go through. They recalled how on the day that he was banished he had appeared among them suddenly, had been coldly polite and had told them that when he appeared again in Rome, as he surely would appear, he would maintain his claims on Metella unabated even if in spite of his warning she should marry. And now here he was appearing on the very day of his arrival in Rome, unable to wait even a day before beginning his campaign of attack. They greeted him cautiously, determined to resist, awaiting his approaches with suspicion. To their surprise, and to their relief, he was friendly. He included Lucius Paetus in his greetings. He was as he had been before the disaster of Sejanus — faintly derisive, somewhat arrogant, smooth and open. 'Here I am, you see,' he said, addressing himself particularly to Caecilia, 'just as I said. I told you I would come back. I make a point of fulfilling all my prophecies.' He said it with a laugh that seemed to invite them to agree rather than to challenge their hostility.

'And how is my good friend Sextus Cornelius?' broke in

Publius determined to take advantage to the full of Aulus's, conciliatory manner.

'He is well, sir, thank you, and very glad to get away from Patmos.'

'Of course, of course, one couldn't expect him to like it. Though in itself it's a nice island, I've been told.'

'My father found it too small, sir. He thinks that the size of an island should be suited to the dignity of the exile. No Senator, in his opinion, should be sent to a small island.'

'You ought to have been in Patmos and he in Cyprus?' suggested Lucius.

'Yes, he felt it deeply,' said his son. 'I should not have been surprised if he had sought permission to become a plebeian in order to make the island the right size.'

They laughed; it was so pleasant to find that whatever he might intend, he was not threatening.

'I hope he was not seasick on his way back,' said Metella. 'He would not like that.'

'He was, and he disliked it very much,' said Aulus. 'He thought it humiliating. Senators, especially of the Cornelian house, ought not to be seasick. It is not the discomfort which angers my father; it is the injustice. Seasickness reduced him to the common level; the rag-tag and bobtail were just as sick as he was, and, what was worse, some of them weren't sick at all. I pointed out to him that nature did not discriminate between patrician and plebeian, and that if Vesuvius ever broke out again — not that it can, of course — he could be killed just as easily as any plebeian or slave. He said that overwhelmed by Vesuvius he could at least die with dignity, but that when seasick he had no dignity and he couldn't die, though he badly wanted to. All his life he has tried to pursue the Golden Mean. Every morning when he wakes up he admonishes himself, "Nothing in excess! Nothing, Sextus, in excess!" and then he finds that it is all of no use, that there is no measure or moderation, when he is so sick that he's tearing his inside out, or trying to and can't. There'll be serious trouble some day, I can tell you, if he meets Neptune, as he always hopes to do when he goes to sea. Ever since he was first sick he has been saving up some tart things to say to the Earthshaker. Neptune will discover what it means to offend a Senator.'

'But at any rate,' said Publius, 'he knows that we Senators must die like any lousy beggar in the Forum?'

'He wouldn't like the way you put it,' said Aulus, 'but I think that privately he admits it to be possible. I have a great respect for my father and I am grateful to him. But I am always sorry for him: he can never be contented because if he is contented he is dissatisfied.'

'But you found Cyprus large enough?' asked Caecilia.

'Too large,' replied Aulus blandly, 'so that on one occasion I escaped and paid a visit to Antioch.' He made a courteous little inclination to Metella.

'Did your trick of pretending to be ill succeed?' asked Metella. 'You remember what you told me.' She could be bold as well as he, she thought.

'Yes,' said Aulus, 'but only just. They demanded to see me the day after I got back, and there I was, ready for them, propped up in bed, surrounded by medicines, the doctor holding my wrist. I think they had become suspicious. I gave them a shock when I went out and rode furiously up and down an hour later.'

'And what are your plans, Aulus?' said Metella, 'now that you are back? But it's too early to ask, I suppose.'

'My plans?' he said. 'Too early? Not at all; I have no secrets from you. I made them years ago, nearly six years ago, and have been thinking them over ever since.' His glance travelled round them confidently. 'I can only tell you the first stage. My father and I have to find out how we stand. Caesar has brought us back - and we think he means us well. But we need a little time - some months I should think - to settle down, to discover who are our friends, and to make sure that we shall not be so unfortunate again in doing whatever we want to do.'

'He is mysterious, isn't he?' said Metella, 'and he said he had no secrets from us!'

'I have none,' said Aulus. 'I am sure you all understand. I am showing - at least so I hope - how my manners have been improved by six years' solitude. Now tell me what has been happening to everyone.'

When Aulus left, half an hour later, Lucius accompanied him to the door.

'I hear,' said Aulus, 'that you brought Pontius Pilate back to his ungrateful country.'

'I did, but he hasn't done so badly. He was acquitted before Caesar's tribunal.'

'Yes, I know, and also that he is broken, dismissed and will be heard of no more — all because he was the most intelligent governor of Judaea Rome has had. Have you heard what his superior, Vitellius, is now doing? You haven't? He is off to Jerusalem to win the favour of the Jews by paying court to them.'

'He believes in winning their confidence by treating them fairly.'

'Tush!' said Aulus. 'You could only do that with Jews if they were submissive, docile people, which is the last thing they are. My dear Lucius, you are a statesman in training, are you not? but the lonely exile can tell you one thing. We shall have to conquer Britain in order to secure our north-western frontiers and we shall have to destroy Jerusalem in order to secure our communications between Egypt and the countries of the East and North. You'll see.' He half-turned as someone approached to pass them. 'Hallo, there's the little Jewess! how she's grown up, by Jove!' It was Iris. Since Aulus saw her she had grown to a woman, tall and slim, holding herself straight and looking all over a free woman. He turned from Lucius and went after her a few steps in order to speak to her. His tone was kindly.

'So you are still with your mistress. I hope that you are useful to her. You are fortunate to be with her.'

'Yes,' she said.

'My mother gave you a message. Did you deliver it?'

'Yes,' said Iris, and as he continued to look at her, smiling but saying nothing more, she said suddenly, 'Where is Thyrsus? You must know. Is he in Rome?'

Aulus looked surprised, then said 'Thyrsus? yes, he's in Rome. I know what you mean. But you need not fear. He will not trouble you again. I've spoken to him. You need not be afraid of him.'

'I'm not afraid of him,' Iris replied. Her breast rose and her eyes were angry. 'I want to know when he is in Rome.'

'I don't believe you're afraid of anyone,' Aulus replied cheerfully. 'You're a girl of spirit! It would serve Thyrsus right if you

were freed and he had to marry you. He would be sorry for it. Perhaps,' he added, noticing that Lucius had come up and was within hearing, 'perhaps I'll free you when you come back to us.'

Iris turned contemptuously and walked away.

'A bit of a tigress!' said Aulus to Lucius. 'That blackguard had better be careful.' He bade Lucius a courteous good-bye.

Lucius went back to the others in the garden. They agreed that Aulus's behaviour had been a pleasant surprise, but none of them thought that it indicated any change in his designs. Caecilia said that his restraint was more ominous than threats of violence. Lucius agreed with her. Metella argued that it might still be possible to reason with him, and Lucius said that, if so, this time he would do the reasoning. Publius said he could not deny that Aulus's purpose was almost certainly unchanged but they must now be diplomatic with him. 'He has shown to-day that he does not wish, or feel strong enough, to attack us at once; we must take advantage of any weaknesses in his position, persuade him of our strength, and try to divert him to some other object — perhaps to a political career or to an attractive marriage alliance.'

'He will not be diverted,' said Lucius. 'How could he be? A Consulship is not Metella, nor can any other woman attract him while she is there.'

He drew Metella to her feet and they went indoors hand-in-hand.

CHAPTER II

THAT was a remarkable summer in Rome. The actions of Gaius even bettered expectations. Disinterring the ashes of his mother Agrippina and his brother Nero, he brought them with all reverence home. He heaped honours on his grandmother Antonia. He put forward his three sisters as equal in importance with himself. He was even kind to his uncle Claudius, the forty-six-year-old brother of his father Germanicus. Claudius the nonentity, the butt, the despised student, the dodderer — slobberer as some wits called him, was chosen by the Emperor to be

his colleague as Consul. All ranks admired Gaius. What a contrast to grudging Tiberius! What family piety! What Roman manliness! The best of it was, as everyone told his neighbours, that the young prince was acting out of his own heart, without calculation, responding to the pure impulses of family affection. Who could fail to be touched by this return of spring?

Publius was busy in these days, bringing home the latest stories of a benevolent Gaius and a grateful Rome. He had determined to speak as soon as possible in the Senate when the Emperor was there. He would only speak, he told his family, on some subject about which he was a recognized authority. That was the way to impress the Emperor. He had two speeches ready. One was full of ideas about agriculture which were based partly on his reading and partly on his practical experience. The other, which was on Imperial policy, was to lead up to the suggestion that although Rome did not desire to extend her frontiers it was necessary, in order that the north might be secure, that she should conquer Britain. Here was a task that called for the highest qualities of the general and the statesman: in short, one that could only be performed by Gaius Caesar. Publius intended to adorn both these speeches with passages from the Latin authors who might, he would suggest, be quoted appropriately at the opening of a new Latin epoch. When, however, the Emperor attended the Senate almost all the Senators desired to speak. The indignation against those who made long speeches was intense. The rivalry was such that long-standing friendships were broken and lifelong enmities created among the competitors. Before Publius got a chance, the Emperor had been many times begged, advised, and almost commanded, to conquer Britain.

Sextus Cornelius spoke. He suggested that he was the first Senator to have had this brilliant idea, he hinted that the credit for the campaign, if it took place, would be his, and he urged that Caesar should tell the Senate that he would do as Sextus recommended. Caesar, regarding him morosely, made no response. In general, however, he was most respectful to the Senate. He consulted it about the smallest matters. Its members were so anxious to display their goodwill towards him that it was really unnecessary for the mob to burst in, as on one occasion

it did, and insist on the Senate granting to Gaius the most extended powers. 'We are made to look,' said an indignant Senator, 'as though we were only giving Caesar these powers under duress and as though our loyalty were in doubt, whereas we are just as loyal as either the mob or the army, and we are not paid, as they are, for loyalty.'

Publius attended with other Senators when Gaius received the Praetorian Guard. They had already been addressed by their officers, who had explained to them that Gaius would make an admirable Chief of State, that he had a high opinion of the Praetorian Guard and that he had the most generous intentions towards them. Cassius Chaerea, now one of these officers, was in great favour with Gaius. Later in the day Publius described to his family the many gifts that Gaius distributed to the Guard; he had not only himself given them money but had also paid what Tiberius had promised them. The Guard, said Publius, were enthusiastic about this wise, enlightened prince.

'I wonder, sir,' said Lucius Paetus, 'what would happen if, on the death of a Caesar, the generals on the different frontiers were each of them to give their own legions gifts of money and perhaps also to bribe the legions of their rivals?'

'Civil war,' said Metella, 'that's what would happen.'

'I hope,' said Publius, 'that Roman Generals would be too patriotic to buy their way to power, but I own that gifts to the Praetorians make me uneasy.' Other sections of the public also were well looked after. There were distributions of coin and of gifts to the common people. Gaius loved the public spectacles (for which the people loved him) and he got great pleasure from watching the crowds scrambling and fighting for the gift tickets which he caused to be thrown among them.

There was scarcely a day when there was not news of some fresh good deed by the Emperor. He had destroyed the evidence which had been accumulated against public men. He had given orders that professional informers should be punished. The many actors whom the severe Tiberius had banished were allowed to return. Writings which had been prohibited could again be circulated. There were banquets for Senators and Knights which Caesar himself attended. A day was added to the greatest of the popular festivals. Caesar desired that he and his people

should share their happiness. There were a few cynics who, pretending to know what went on behind the scenes, said that it was all a popularity-hunting dodge, prescribed for Gaius, in order to establish him firmly, by politic advisers like his father-in-law, Silanus, and Macro (the same who had made an end of Sejanus). And why, pray, said the indignant listeners, should the noble youth not have the credit for taking good advice, and for carrying it out with an air of charming sincerity?

And then, in October of his first year of power, Gaius fell desperately ill. It was feared that he would die. There was an immense competition in grief for his danger and prayers for his recovery; it was unbelievable and unbearable that the flowers of the new springtime should be abruptly snatched from the Roman people before they could be reasonably enjoyed. If Rome had lost her Tiberius must she also lose her fairy prince? In every temple in Rome and through the provinces vows were made on his behalf. In Rome one man promised the gods that he would give his life for that of Gaius if only Gaius recovered. Another undertook that, by a similar bargain, he would fight in the arena as a Gladiator. At last the word went out that Caesar was recovering, was better, was himself again. The Senate, the Knights and the people had a fresh opportunity to show how loyal they were, how grateful for their good fortune. Rome relaxed. Throughout November and December the family of Publius Antonius went quietly about their business. If occasionally they and any of the family of Sextus Cornelius met they greeted each other civilly, and went their way. Aulus had not repeated his call at the house. It was reported that he had strong political ambitions; certainly he was often to be seen at the Emperor's palace. His father also was an industrious courtier but with no success. Most people said that this was due to his unfortunate manner, which suggested that he was conferring a favour by knowing Caesar, others that Caesar had not forgiven those who had been near to Sejanus, though he did not visit his resentment on his own friend Aulus.

Towards the end of December Aulus, arriving at the house, handed to Publius a letter from his father, and said pleasantly that both of them hoped for a favourable answer soon. Before leaving he courteously greeted Caecilia and Metella, inquired

about Lucius's health and announced that he had brought a letter from his father — 'about Metella and me', he said pleasantly to Caecilia. 'It's been too long delayed — I am becoming impatient. But my father is very cautious nowadays; he's afraid that he may still pay for his connection with Sejanus, so he waits and waits. Also, he's always hoping that Caesar will stop disliking him.'

'You're not, of course, afraid that Caesar will dislike you?' said Metella.

'Why, no,' replied Aulus. 'That's part of my plan to get my own way — about you, I mean. Didn't you know? Without Caesar, if possible, but with Caesar, if necessary.'

Sextus Cornelius in his letter wrote —

'Sextus Cornelius to Publius Antonius.

I am sure, my dear Publius Antonius, that you expected to hear from me long ago. I must plead that, for reasons known to you, I was in exile for six years. During this time it would have been useless for me to raise the question which I now raise by this letter. Moreover, my son too was in exile. But you have no doubt expected that when, by the gracious clemency of Caesar, I returned to Rome, I would write to you at once. I preferred, however, not to press any personal or family interest at a time when Rome was rejoicing at the happy change in her fortunes. I had also hoped that you would yourself recognize that you must rectify the injustice which you inflicted on me and my family six years ago. Such a spontaneous action would, I am sure, have greatly pleased Caesar himself.

Then came Caesar's illness and the universal fear that Rome was to be deprived of her saviour, worthy to be ranked with the Divine Julius and the Divine Augustus. Now that the clouds have passed away, now that the reign of law unshakably takes the place of arbitrary power, now that Gaius Caesar, the dispenser of justice, will listen to any man, however humble, who appeals to him for redress of grievances, I do what I should have been justified in doing at any time in the last six years had it been in my power.

You owe me a debt of honour, which I cannot doubt that

you will pay. Had I any doubt, I should demand that you arrange with your son-in-law Lucius Paetus to divorce your daughter Metella, in order that she may marry my son Aulus. Having no doubt, I do not need to demand. I feel sure that you have only been waiting for this formal intimation.

My son Aulus requests me to add that should your daughter Metella desire it, he is willing to allow her son Publius to be brought up in his own household and treated as equal with the children whom she bears to him. I feel sure that this generosity, which, in the opinion of my wife and myself, goes further than is strictly necessary, will lead you to appreciate the more highly the opportunity of uniting your family with mine.

I shall be glad to have your answer as soon as possible. If you, your wife and your daughter are well, I also am well.'

Publius, having read the letter several times, read it aloud to Caecilia, then to Pericles, and then to the whole family. He announced that he must be careful to choose the appropriate tactics. Prudence was demanded. He proposed to reply at once saying that he had received the letter, that the question it raised deserved the closest study, and that he would as soon as possible give a considered answer.

'The closest study!' said Metella scornfully. 'When we know that all he is going to get is a point-blank refusal. Why not say so?'

'It really does seem to me, Publius,' said Caecilia, 'that we shall gain nothing by pretending that we are going even to look at his shameful suggestion. Why let him think that we are afraid of him? Let them all know the truth at once.'

Both Lucius Paetus and Lollia Claudia, however, urged that there should be no curtness. To gain time was a success in itself. Sextus Cornelius might die; Aulus might fall out of favour with the Emperor; the expedition to Britain of which everyone was talking might really take place and Aulus might go with it; something or other might happen. A crisis postponed might never come. During the next fortnight Publius spent much time in drafting his answer. 'I must write it in such a way,' he said,

‘that, if it should ever be published in later times — and who can predict the turns of history? — it shall be seen to be worthy of me, of a lover of letters, and of a Roman Senator.’ During those days he constantly consulted Pericles because, he said, ‘although the dear fellow is a little given to quotations, he is as much a master of taste as an example of sound judgment’. His reply ran thus —

‘Publius Antonius to Sextus Cornelius.

It is true, my dear Sextus Cornelius, that I should not have been surprised if you had written to me before now. I am not concerned to deny that I gave you a promise, though not a legal undertaking, and that I broke the promise. But I am entitled to recall the circumstances. Had I not been willing to give my daughter to your son, it was certain, as I saw it, that my whole family would have paid the penalty. I was moved not by ambition but by a fear, which I hope was not wholly ignoble, since it was for others rather than for myself. You invoked the aid of Sejanus to decide me, and he not obscurely threatened me with his displeasure. When Sejanus fell there was no longer any reason why I should try to make my daughter do violence to her own choice of a husband. The happiness of her life was at stake. She loved Lucius Paetus, who was connected with no party in the State, and by marrying him she would be lifted clean out of the partisan warfare which had just led to such a bloody climax. I approved of the marriage. I brought it about as quickly as I could in order to save my daughter from the consequences of my own miscalculation. I am prepared to defend the one decision as I was the other.

I acknowledge that against me you have a just grievance. I put the happiness of my wife and daughter before my word to you, and I do not regret it. You have written as a father. Put yourself, I beg you, in my place and say whether you would have done other than I did. I hope that I may have your pardon. I would like even to claim your friendship, and that of your wife — to whom pray present my respectful salutations — for my daughter and her husband. I would rejoice, as would we all, to hear that your son Aulus had

made the distinguished marriage which his own merits as well as those of his father and mother well deserve.

If you and they are well, I also am well.'

Publius read this letter aloud, stressing the points nicely. Looking round at his family he said, 'I think it is neat and politic?' But Sextus Cornelius was affronted. 'He shows no signs of recognizing the gravity of his offence. He has no idea how fortunate he was to be offered the chance of joining our family and how generous we are in giving him a second chance.'

'Perhaps he remembers,' said Aulus, 'that if he had actually joined it he would have been killed or exiled. People attach importance to such things. What I feel is that he could have waited; he could have kept Metella for me until I returned. He could have waited, therefore he should have waited. That's what I have against him.'

Aelia Memmia was scornful of her husband. 'It's no use talking about the greatness of our family,' she said. 'That didn't prevent you and Aulus from losing more than five years of your lives. The only thing that matters now is to get Metella divorced, and if Publius Antonius won't see to it, we should go straight to Caesar.'

'Straight to Caesar!' replied her husband not less scornful. 'I wish, my dear, that you paid a little more attention to the obvious facts. I don't pretend to know why it is so, but I have no influence with Caesar, hard as I have tried since I returned. I am afraid that in this case youth has little respect for age or inexperience for knowledge. I suppose that in my presence he feels himself immature and resents it. It is not a sign of strength. It discourages me.'

Aulus laughed. 'Don't let it discourage you too much, father. I assure you that if he has lacked confidence hitherto he is fast getting it. Before long everyone will be thinking he's got too much. Leave him to me. Say nothing more to Publius Antonius. Let them wonder what we are going to do next. In the meantime I will exert myself with Caesar to make up for your extreme unpopularity — you've offended him somehow, father — and when I am sure that he is willing to help me I shall take action. But not at present. Patience is the word. I learned it in Cyprus,

where there was no other. In the meantime I am going to see Metella in a few weeks' time and give her a chance to settle everything peaceably. I would have no great grievance against Lucius Paetus, even though he has given her a child, provided that he divorced her and gave her up to me.'

'You are very forgiving,' said his mother. 'They don't deserve it.'

'They don't quite see me as you do, Mother. You regard me in the same way as father does our family. You think that anyone who acquires me is greatly to be envied.'

'In my opinion, Aulus, Metella was pledged to you, you believed that yourself, and however long you were away, she was yours just the same. If she became someone else's you are entitled to disregard it. The sooner she is divorced and marries you the better. Why can't you speak to Caesar?'

'Because,' Aulus said and laughed again, 'Caesar is not yet behaving so queerly that I can rely on him. Leave it to me, Mother. I am educating Caesar.'

At the end of March he sent a slave to Metella with a message saying that he would like to see her privately, 'about our future'. 'It is useless for your father and mine to go on exchanging letters. My father will never stop, and yours, for obvious reasons, will not want him to. It is a pleasant hobby for the old gentlemen, but I must see you soon in order to discover finally whether between you and me it is peace or war.'

Lucius said that he ought to see Aulus in order to save Metella from annoyance. It would be the same old thing — a little cajoling and then threats; there would be something about Metella's indiscreet references to Tiberius and to Gaius; something about her father's attempt to marry her into the Sejanus group; something about the mysterious meetings that Publius had held on the seashore. He should be allowed to handle it, or at least he should be present with Metella. But Metella would not hear of it. The presence of Lucius, she said, would infuriate Aulus. Whether she persuaded him to be reasonable or had to defy him, it was better that she personally should find out his intentions; he would tell her if anyone, and the more they knew about his plans the better.

So it was agreed. On the morning of the day when Aulus was to come, Metella, going to her room, found Iris arranging some

chairs. At each side of the room she had placed a chair, and by each chair a stool.

'The chairs, I suppose,' said Metella, 'are for me and Aulus Cornelius, but why the stools?'

'One is for me, madam, and the other for Thyrsus.'

'Thyrsus?' said Metella, astonished. 'But he won't be coming. He would never think of coming here unless he came to kill us. And if he tried to come I would refuse him admittance or, if he got in, I would expel him forcibly. But you would not want to see him again, would you?'

'Why not?' said Iris, 'I did him no harm, so that I need not be ashamed to see him again. I haven't seen him for over five years. I would not mind seeing him now so that I shall know what he is like if I should come across him.'

Aulus, however, came alone. Having greeted Metella, he inquired carefully after her father and mother, Lucius and Young Publius. He said that he envied Lucius, who had a permanent post in administration; he wished he had entered that sort of government service rather than start on the tedious pursuit of Senatorial honours. But that wasn't what he had come to talk about. 'I've been back in Rome the best part of a year now, after being away more than five years. All that time I've said nothing to you of what you know I feel. You will admit that I've been patient, Metella. But I told you before I went to Cyprus that I withdrew nothing of my claims and would present them again when I returned. And here I am, at last. My father insisted on having his say—he has his dignity to think of—but that is finished, and I make my own petition.' He was pleasant, respectful, almost deferential.

'I hoped that you had ceased to think about me, Aulus, after all this time. You can't act as though nothing had happened. I'm a married woman, with a son five years old. I'm surprised that you waste your time on me, and I'm sorry too. It's quite hopeless, Aulus. Can't you see that, and accept it?'

'My dear Metella, I told you that nothing you could do would change my feelings or my intentions. If I did not alter during my exile I am not likely to alter now that I am free. I have always loved you even if, as may be, I didn't always go the right way to show it. Your father gave a promise to my father —'

'You know he did it because he was afraid of the consequences to my mother and to me if he did not.'

'And you yourself made me as good as a promise in a letter that I have not forgotten.'

'That was when I wanted to save Iris and you were bargaining with me. I had to save her, and there was no other way.'

'A mere girl, a Jewish slave!' He snapped his fingers, his voice grew harsh. 'I do not relish being tricked for so little. I prefer to think that you meant what you said —'

'I did not, and you knew it, you always knew it.'

'I prefer to think that your father married you to someone else for the same reason that he would have married you to me — the security of his family. I am not blaming him. I bear him no grudge nor the man who married you either, provided that what was done is now undone. The time has come and it will not wait much longer.'

'It is impossible. You are mad to suggest it. Lucius would never divorce me and I would never let him. We love each other. We do not do such things.'

'All the best families do such things.' His mood had changed again; he was mocking but no longer angry. 'Divorce is nothing nowadays. And you have your son. He could stay with you or his father as you might decide; it is all the same to me. After all, how can you do better than imitate the gods? The Divine Julius divorced his wife Pompeia because of a mere breath of suspicion, probably quite baseless.'

'The divine Julius refused to divorce his first wife Cornelia — one of your house, by the way — in spite of all the threats of the dictator Sulla.'

'I give you Julius, then. But the Divine Augustus divorced his first wife even before he lived with her because he disliked his mother-in-law — they joked about it in the streets — and he divorced her successor Scribonia merely because she was a shrew. There's a godlike model for you!'

'The Divine Augustus stuck to his third wife Livia for fifty-two years. There's a model for me and Lucius.'

'It can't be, Metella. I warn you. We may as well stop fencing. Sooner or later, Lucius Paetus must divorce you.'

'How will you make him?'

He smiled at her indulgently and got up from his chair. 'Innocent Metella! You would like to know. I do not myself clearly know as yet. There may be things that you would so much desire to avoid that you could even ask your husband to let you come to me.'

'You threaten us?'

'Of course, though I would rather not. I have been trying to persuade you all this time in order that I might not have to threaten. Tell me, what would happen if Gaius Caesar, the Emperor, some day ordered Lucius Paetus to divorce his wife in order that she might marry me?'

There was a silence. Then Metella said, 'I think you are lying. I don't believe that you have such influence with Caesar.'

'I haven't yet, and I have not said I have. But it may come. You see how modest I am in my claim.'

'If it came true I would go to Caesar myself and denounce you.'

'I don't think you would. Not if your husband knew. You might be better off with me than with Gaius Caligula, if you went on such an errand. You know, Metella' — here he sat down again and talked in a leisurely, confidential way, relishing what he was saying — 'Caesar is not quite what many people think. He is changing. I think he is getting tired of those advisers who have been telling him to court the favour of the people and the Senate by doing all that is right and just and proper. I think he is listening to those who point out to him that he is all-powerful, absolute, responsible to no one, able to do what he likes to whom he likes without let or hindrance. The younger men and women about him, those more or less of his own age, are telling him this, and he likes more and more to hear it.'

'And possibly among the mentors is Aulus Cornelius, who hopes to gain from the new autocracy? Or is Caesar to be a god as well as autocrat?'

'It will be enough for me if he is autocrat, but, of course, it may be that he will decide to be a god as well. I merely think I see some signs. You have to reckon, Metella, that he might some day order Lucius Paetus to divorce you. Why not avoid the unpleasantness by getting your husband to do it voluntarily?'

'The trouble from your point of view is that it would do you no good. Even if Lucius divorced me, which he will never do, I

would not marry you. Nothing would make me. Neither the Emperor nor anything that you could do.'

He shook his head. 'That will not prevent me from finding out, if you persist. But do not be afraid, nothing shall hurt you personally. You can rely on that. Nothing did at Alexandria, did it? But remember, others may not be so fortunate.'

Metella rose. 'You had better go,' she said. 'When you threaten to force me through those I love I have no more to say to you. You pretend to love me, but you do not — you hate me, you are contemptible.'

Aulus stood still looking at her for a second. 'I do both,' he said. 'I love you as I have always loved you and because you do not love me but someone else I hate you. That is true. I am burned up — like Catullus — I told you once that I knew two lines of him. I don't mind telling you what they are. I feel them in my bones.

"I hate and love. Perhaps you ask me why. I cannot say but I know that it is so. I love and hate at once, and I suffer agony".'

'Poor Aulus. I do not want you to suffer, but I cannot help you. I cannot marry you. I belong to Lucius.'

'I love you, and you will marry me.'

'You cannot make me, Aulus. At the finish you cannot force any one of us against our will. We have our freedom and we can always put ourselves, if the worst comes, beyond the reach of you or even Caesar. But I hope it won't come to that. If you really love me it will overcome your hatred. Now you had better go lest' — she smiled at him though her voice trembled — 'lest we quarrel.' She clapped her hands and Pericles, waiting not far away, came to show Aulus out.

'You are not yet a freedman?' said Aulus to him at the door.

'No, sir.'

'But always about to become one, I am sure?'

'Yes, sir. So I understand.'

'I congratulate you. The anticipation is often more pleasurable, I am told, than the reality.'

'It is so, I believe, with most of the known pleasures except those that are purely of the mind.'

'In which at the moment I am not interested. But certainly, your master is good to you in not taking away the pleasure of anticipation. You must be grateful.'

'Yes, sir, I am much indebted to him.'

Aulus looked at him with contempt. 'You have a slave's spirit and you deserve to be a slave. I would sooner have the rogue Thyrsus than such a spiritless creature. He would cut a throat any day to gain his ends. By the way, was it not you that flogged that fine gentleman?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And your mistress Metella gave you the orders?'

'It was I, sir, who flogged Thyrsus.'

'The correct reply! Stick to it. And now listen. They trust you in this house, you have their confidence. They treat you as a friend?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Then persuade them to be sensible. Make them understand that unless they do as I have asked — I expect you know about it — they will be destroyed.'

He waited a few moments while Pericles looked at him in silence. 'Well, say something, man! Have you lost your tongue? I mean what I have said. They think a lot of you here, I know. Warn them not to destroy themselves. Well?'

'I take what you say seriously, sir. We shall undoubtedly have to protect ourselves.'

'There's another thing. You know that Thyrsus threatens violence?'

'I was in Alexandria, sir.'

'He has his instructions from me and I don't think that he will disobey. But he is a scoundrel and I can't be sure. Take care, then, of your young mistress, for I should not forget it if she came to any harm.' His voice, which had been threatening, became playful again. 'And take care of yourself. Avoid dark streets, corners and especially flights of steps. But there, as you said, you've been in Alexandria. Remember, I'm serious.'

'So am I, too, sir.' Pericles went indoors to report.

They talked over Aulus's assertion that Caesar was being urged to follow his own desires whatever they might be and that he was disposed to find the counsel good. In that light some things

looked different. He was still popular, spending money freely and giving lavish spectacles. But Lucius Paetus, who was high up now in the Eastern Department, having been recommended by Vitellius, reported that there was serious criticism, not merely of Gaius's extravagance but of the capricious way in which he squandered the money. Tiberius, like Augustus, had been careful of money, but Gaius was fast emptying the Treasury. He spent recklessly on the Games, chariot-racing, gladiators, actors, and anyone who took his fancy. The public and the Senate applauded, so proving to Gaius that those who said he could do anything were right. But money had to be had, since the army had to be paid, and the people had to be bribed. Lucius reported that all his colleagues were wondering where the money was to come from. They soon discovered that the Emperor had his own ideas. It was rumoured, and not inaccurately, that the incriminating evidence against individuals, which Gaius was said to have destroyed when Tiberius died, still in fact existed and was to be used. Many a man would pay heavily to avoid prosecution while, if he was found guilty, all his property was justly forfeited to the State, which was the Emperor.

Lollia Claudia was a constant visitor at Publius's house in these days. She had become passionately fond of Young Publius, much to the distaste of all the relatives and suitors who industriously courted her in the hope of legacies. She had been no more than amused when it was known that Gaius was rapidly dissipating the treasure that the careful Tiberius had accumulated. 'It takes a Claudius,' she said, 'to save all that money and it takes another to spend it.' But she said frankly that she was frightened when Gaius now began to show his disregard for human life. The news spread that Macro and his wife Ennia had been forced to take their lives, although it was Macro who, in disposing of Sejanus, had assured Gaius of the supreme power and although Gaius was reported to have had Ennia as his mistress Macro had committed no offence. Lollia did not think that Gaius hated him as the person who, when he first came to power, had given him good advice, and kept him in leading strings. She thought that he had turned against Macro suddenly and without reason, and that what he would do to one he would do to many others. For the killing of Ennia different reasons

were offered; some said simply that Gaius wanted to be rid of a discarded mistress, others that he had promised to marry her if he became Emperor, that she importuned him, and that he was tired of it. But they all of them found the most alarming sign in the vindictive cruelty that Gaius was beginning to show. The man who had vowed to fight as a gladiator if Gaius recovered from his illness was compelled to enter the arena. The sycophant who, going still further, had promised to sacrifice his life, was told to do it. Report vividly described, even if it invented, the glee with which Gaius gave the orders and afterwards heard that they had been executed. These were uneasy weeks; Publius and his family heard nothing of Aulus but, as each report came in of some new extravagance by Gaius, Metella wondered how far Aulus was succeeding in the plan to stimulate him to excesses of arbitrary power.

One midsummer day the word went round that Drusilla was ill, though not seriously. Senators and officials, whispering together, asked each other how it was that the most famous physicians in Rome had been summoned and others even sent for from foreign parts. Then Lollia Claudia arrived at Publius's house almost panic-stricken, a strange state for that hardy woman. 'Drusilla is dying,' she said. 'One of my freedmen was visiting a friend who is a freedman of old "Uncle Claudius", and Claudius came in and gave them the news. He is scared for his life, and so is everybody else. What's going to become of Gaius now? What's he going to do? How's he going to bear it?'

'Is there any truth, Lollia?' said Metella, 'in these terrible stories about Gaius and Drusilla?'

'You mean that he is her lover? There's no truth in them at all, and never was. They're wicked inventions because he is fond of her, as, of course, he is. We saw that for ourselves at Sur-rentum. It's true that he took her away from her husband, and brought her back to the palace, but that was because he couldn't get on without her, and my prediction is that it will be the same now, only much worse because there will be no bringing her back this time. I tell you I don't know what's going to happen. He has relied on her ever since he was a boy. He was always with her when they lived with their grandmother Antonia. That was the time in which he heard that his mother and his two

brothers had been hustled off to exile or prison. He was frightened enough then and it was always Drusilla who comforted him and gave him courage. And then the old tyrant sent for him to Capreae and Gaius never knew from one hour to another whether he might not go the same way as his brothers. It was Drusilla who had the courage if he had the caution, and she loved him as much as he her. But for her he would never have stood those last six years on the island. He knew what he owed her and that is why, when he was ill himself last year, he made her the heir to both his property and his power. In spite of his pretences he cares nothing for his other sisters. And now he will be alone, and he will always be afraid.'

'But what has he to fear, Lollia?'

'Nothing, but he will fear everything, and there will be no Drusilla to speak a soothing word or give his hand a reassuring touch. I tell you' — she spoke with energy — 'I know him, and what rules his mind is fear. That is why Macro and his father-in-law Silanus could persuade him easily at first to behave nicely in all that he did. He was released from the fear that he had had on the island and he liked the sense of being popular. It made him feel secure. He could trust his loving people. But that was passing and he was beginning to fear again — and to feel the need of asserting himself by the exercise of power in order to prove to himself that he, Gaius, had no need to fear anybody. What does he fear? you say. He fears the gods, the army, the Senate and the mob, the rivals in his own family or anyone else's family, anyone who can hurt him, anyone who knows or suspects what is going on inside him, night with its secrets, life itself. Drusilla was the one person to whom he could turn for protection against the terrors of his own mind. Now, if she goes, he will be naked to them and he will try to cover himself up, to give himself confidence, by disposing of men and affairs as though he were all-powerful, a demi-god, raised above fear. But I know that in all the blood and horror that is coming to others Gaius will be crying to himself, in dreadful desperation, that he is not, he is not, no, he is not afraid.'

The next day Drusilla died. Rome heard that Gaius, unable to endure the palace or Rome, had fled in the night to Sicily. He came back haggard and wretched, with his mind half unhinged.

He could think of nothing but how to honour Drusilla as no woman yet had been honoured. It was not enough to give her all the honours that had been heaped on Livia, who had aided Augustus to rule the Roman world for half a century. Nor was it enough that a golden statue should be set up in the Senate house. In the Temple of Venus in the Forum she was to have a statue as large as the Goddess herself. She was to have a temple of her own, with her own staff of priests, and a great festival was to be celebrated on her birthday. But who should need a temple and a statue Venus-size except a goddess? So Drusilla was declared a veritable goddess under the title of Panthea. The Senators competed in support of all these measures, for they were back again in the worst days of Tiberius, fearing short shrift if they displeased Caesar and hoping to be rewarded if they pleased him. One Senator, Livius Geminius, made a brilliantly audacious stroke. He declared that with his own eyes he had seen Drusilla being translated to heaven and communing with the gods. It might have cost him his life to have seen something which the jealous Gaius could have declared to have been reserved for himself. But Gaius, who was furious at any suggestion that he was going too far, was delighted that in the crucial matter of the godhead he should have the support of the distinguished Senator, and he bestowed on Geminius a magnificent gift of money. He suspected also, for he now suspected everything, that the people of Rome did not mourn Drusilla according to her deserts. He therefore appointed a period of mourning in which no one might bathe or dine in company or even laugh. If Drusilla might be worshipped as an immortal goddess, no one must be cheerful at her putting on of immortality.

But must not a creator of gods be himself a greater god? Perhaps it was because he could turn his sister into a goddess that he came to believe that there was nothing he himself could not do. But all the generous qualities that had made him popular now disappeared. He despised the Senate. He accused the Senators of having plotted against his parents and his brothers and of being the henchmen of Sejanus — a charge of treason. He hated the people. He was heard saying that they could hate him so long as they feared him. At the Games, when the supply of condemned criminals ran short, he had some of the crowd thrown

to the beasts. He could not bear it if a distinguished visitor attracted more attention than himself. He was furious if the people openly disagreed with his judgment about the performers in the theatre. He encouraged informers, of whom the crowd openly showed their detestation. He put many men to death, often for their money. Many others he compelled to fight for their lives in the arena. Some of Tiberius's victims whom he had released from prison in the days of his clemency he executed on the very charges on which Tiberius had imprisoned them. He was perverse in all personal relations. No one knew how he would take anything that was said or done in his presence. Even more than Lollia Claudia had thought to be possible, he was unaccountable.

CHAPTER III

GAIUS had grandiose ideas. He must do this or that, things to gape at, that no one else had ever done. He would bridge the sea more magnificently than the Hellespont had been bridged by Xerxes or Darius, the Persian despots, when they invaded Greece. He would drive or ride over the bridge as though he were on dry land. He would be the veritable conqueror of the sea, as powerful, so the flatterers told him, as the sea-god himself. He ordered shipping to be collected in the bay from Puteoli to Baiae which was some three and a half miles wide. Then, drawing the ships up two abreast, he loaded them with earth, building a firm surface over them and adding occasional structures as though this were a real road on land. There was much excitement, and some shaking of heads, when the Emperor's plans became known. It was all so wasteful, so purposeless, so crazy, said the critics, but when it became known that the Emperor would welcome distinguished spectators along the shores of the bay, there was a great rush not to be left out. There was no telling whom the Emperor might see, notice and reward. If he was capable of making a man into a praetor (who ranked next to a Consul in status) simply because he gloated over his food as he ate, what might he not do for anyone whom he found at Puteoli glorifying his heroic

achievements? Publius, having thought deeply, said that he was going whoever else was not. 'One must,' he said, 'be prudent. It cannot do us any harm for me to be seen there, and it might easily do us good. If only I can get near the Emperor and greet him with an appropriate speech, not necessarily a long one, I am convinced that he might do anything for us. We need personal contact; that is how Aulus is working against us. But prudence is the word — prudence and determination. We must put ourselves in Caesar's way, firmly but, of course, respectfully. This is a good opportunity to outgeneral Sextus Cornelius, who I know is not going. I am told that when he sent a greeting to the Emperor on his coming to power he took some sentences from the famous Secular Hymn of Horace. In these the poet was praying to the gods that they would make the youth of Rome amenable to reason. The Emperor at all events, Sextus is reported to have said, was certainly not showing himself amenable to reason, and he himself did not see why he should by his presence support one who was so irrational.' Publius expressed the opinion that such talk (and writing) were imprudent. The rest of the family had not the heart to oppose him, so sure he was that by this display of prudence he might secure them all against the threats of Aulus. Even Lollia Claudia thought that her dear old friend could not but make a good impression, if he were ever allowed to see Gaius and his advisers.

'You'll take Pericles with you, father?' said Metella when they were discussing the plans.

'Of course, my dear. You know what I said to him when he brought you all back safely from Egypt and Syria?'

'He was very good, father, but we helped to save ourselves, you know.'

'I'm sure you did, my dear. But you must admit that Pericles, like old Ulysses, excels in understanding, and so he will bring me, too, back, if need be, from burning fire.'

'And Lucius is going, too, father.'

'No, my dear, I should like having him, and it would be a holiday for him, but I feel that he would be a fish out of water. It will be, I fear, a reckless and irresponsible entertainment.'

'If you go, Publius, Lucius is going with you,' interrupted Caecilia. 'If not, I shall have to go myself.' She was firm.

'Very well, my dear. If you say so. It will be very pleasant to have both of them.'

On the next day Publius met Aulus, who always treated him with respect. When the great bridge was mentioned Publius could not resist the impulse to announce that he was going, but — with great prudence, he thought — he did not mention his hope of winning a good word from Caesar. He mentioned that Lucius and Pericles would be with him.

'Will they?' said Aulus. 'A pleasant family party! Perhaps I'll see something of you. You're not invited to go on the bridge itself with Caesar, are you? Oh, if you're on the shore I really think that you'll be better off. By the way' — he adopted his tone of polite effrontery — 'you'd better mention to Pericles that my freedman Thyrsus, whom I believe he knows, will be there. He may be with me or he may be by himself. He's wealthy in these days and moves in the highest company. I keep him in order, but when there's a celebration of this kind and the wine is flowing freely it's not easy to control everyone. Apart from yourself, it would be rather a tempting target, you know — Lucius Paetus and the smug Pericles.'

'Pericles is not smug,' said Publius indignantly. 'You don't know him. He's modest and he's intelligent. Also he's honest.'

'He's too good to live,' said Aulus. 'That's why you should warn him, Publius Antonius.'

'And I must warn Lucius, too,' said Publius. 'Thyrsus might attack him in order to hurt Metella.'

Aulus regarded him coolly. 'I should not die of grief,' he said. 'But warn Lucius Paetus if you like. It will make no difference in the end.'

Publius showed some anger when he described the encounter. 'He obviously thinks that Pericles is threatened and he does not mind if Lucius is destroyed. It is all grist to his mill. Well, we'll keep a sharp look-out for Thyrsus and if the three of us can't handle him we should be ashamed to call ourselves Romans. That reminds me, Pericles, I really must see that you are freed. Now, I mean. I've decided not to leave it to my will. I shall do it before we set off for the bridge. So that's settled!' He was pleased; he looked affectionately at Pericles.

'Thank you, sir,' said Pericles. 'I shall always be grateful.'

So they all went to Puteoli to see the bridge. (Publius had done nothing about freeing Pericles.) Gaius put on what was alleged to be the breastplate of the conqueror Alexander, he donned sword and shield and wore a chaplet of oak leaves. Then he charged on horseback over the bridge into Puteoli; rested there after such warlike exertions; drove back again in a chariot, followed by his friends and flatterers (Aulus among them), made a speech from the bridge, gave money to his soldiers, and finally held a great feast. It began in the day and went on into the night. When darkness fell there were flares on the bridge and a chain of fires on the hills round the bay. The night was as bright as day. Then, at his invitation, many of the spectators along the shores, some of the most distinguished men in Rome, put off in boats to visit the bridge. Some of them climbed up on to it, others remained in their boats, rowing alongside, shouting to their friends above and around them, and admiring the illuminations. There was much noisy merriment. Presently it was noticed that many of the Emperor's followers and soldiers on the bridge were coming down and getting into the boats which were waiting by the side. These were rowing boats fitted with a sharp beak in the prow. Many of those who had come out from the shore thought that this was some new form of entertainment devised by Gaius for their benefit, and were only dubious because so many of the actors, being drunk, might be incapable of playing their part. Then, as one of the sharp-beaked boats crashed into a yacht that had brought visitors, there were cries of dismay and protests at the clumsiness. But another boat did the same thing, and then another, until in a few minutes' time it became clear that what was happening was no accident but a plan to upset or sink the visiting boats and throw the occupants into the sea. At the same time there was commotion on the bridge itself. In the centre Gaius and his closest companions, Aulus among them, sprang out of the rest-rooms and lodgings where they had been concealed. They were equipped with poles and boat-hooks and, shouting madly as though they were repelling the stormers of a city, they fell on the unlucky visitors and, pushing, buffeting, stabbing, hustled them off the bridge into the sea below. An immense hubbub arose of men fighting and shouting, of the attacked and sometimes the attackers crashing into the sea, of

boats driven violently together, and the screams of wounded men as the oars struck them or the boats drove over them and they drowned miserably. From the edge of the bridge the Emperor exulted over the battle for which he had provided both the victors and the victims.

Publius, with his two companions and a few friends, had come out in a boat for which he insisted on paying on condition that they were all to assist him to get as close as possible to the Emperor. Arriving somewhat late, they were puzzled as they approached the bridge by the din, the exhortations and protests, the clash of the boats and the wild, drunken exultation of the figures on the bridge.

Publius pointed in great excitement. 'It's a sham fight. They did not tell us about this. But some of them are getting hurt, too! My word, look at that! That boat's going over, the whole lot are in the water, and there are some women, too. Why, they'll be drowned. Here, we must rescue them.'

'It's not a sham fight,' said Lucius. 'It's murder. They're sinking the boats everywhere. Let's get out of this. Get the boat round.' He shouted at the oarsmen to back water and turn the boat, while Publius shouted at them loudly to go on and rescue the people in the water though by this time half a dozen of the boats around them had been capsized or sunk and heads by the score were bobbing in the sea. The oarsmen were confused, some trying to go forward, some to stop, some to turn round. Suddenly one of the beaked craft, rowed by a dozen oarsmen, came on furiously, crashed into them broadside, turned the boat almost over and shot all on board into the water. The boat fell back on to an even keel and the attacker drew off. But in a few seconds, at the shouts of the helmsmen, it rushed forward again and ploughed its way through those struggling in the water, striking some of them and pushing them down. There were several men on board apart from the rowers and these, and the helmsman, too, seized spare oars and struck savagely at their victims. Then they passed on and those still afloat tried to swim to their own boat again and scramble into it. Publius was dragged aboard unconscious. He had been sitting near the middle of the side of the boat, had met the full shock of the collision and had been thrown violently overboard. Pericles had a gash on the

shoulder where the helmsman, reaching out as far as he could, had brought the oar down on him. Lucius Paetus, though the same oar crashed into the water a foot from his head, was uninjured. They helped Publius into the boat and chafed his limbs as two or three of the oarsmen moved the boat laboriously towards the shore. Soon they found that it was steadily filling with water; the attackers' beak had driven a hole in the side which was only just above the water-line. They laboured hard, but the boat sank and fifty yards from land Publius, now half-conscious, was supported, and almost carried, through the water by his son-in-law and Pericles. At last on shore, they laid him down while Pericles ran to fetch some of the household slaves and a litter. They carried him to a villa where he was staying with a friend, put him to bed and sent for physicians. He was in the same collapsed state. The physician reported that he was suffering from the shock of the collision and exposure, that his heart was dangerously feeble and that it was very necessary, as soon as he could be safely moved, to get him home. Publius had recovered enough to hear them say this. 'Safely moved?' he said with gentle scorn, 'safely or not, moved I will be as soon as it is not certain that I shall die on the road. I want to get back to my own house, to Caecilia and Metella.'

After the physicians had gone, having given their instructions to the slave who acted as doctor to the household in the villa, and after Publius had fallen asleep, Lucius said to Pericles: 'That man in the boat, the one who steered it into us and then battered us with the oar — that was Thyrsus?'

'Yes, sir. It was Thyrsus. I think he was looking for us. He must have been told we were coming. I saw his boat when it was thirty yards away and heading for us. I think he had just seen us, for he was shouting violently to the rowers and was pointing to us. The master might easily have been killed, sir. He would have been if he had been hit with the oar.'

'We must get him home,' said Lucius, 'if we can. You know how ill he is?'

'Yes, sir, of course.' But Pericles looked startled, and in a moment he said in a low voice, 'I didn't understand it was like that.'

In the morning Aulus called at the villa. Gravely saluting

Lucius, he said that he was distressed by the accident which he understood had happened to Publius Antonius. He had called to express his regret.

'From whom did you hear of it?' asked Lucius coldly.

'From my freedman Thyrsus. He had the misfortune, I gather, to be in the boat that threw Publius Antonius into the water.'

'Did he himself call it a misfortune?'

'It is a polite phrase, my dear Lucius, used by me, not by Thyrsus, as being appropriate to my visit of sympathy.'

'Thyrsus was the steersman. He rammed our boat deliberately when he saw who was aboard and as he drove through us he and his friends tried to beat our brains out with their oars.'

'My dear Lucius, what an inventive imagination you have. You are lost in a Government Department. Surely you know what happened last night. The Emperor had planned the whole entertainment most carefully. He is lighthearted and he wanted us to be lighthearted, too. It was all a frolic, which everyone was expected to take in good part. I assure you that he would be displeased if he found anyone taking it otherwise. As for Thyrsus attacking you intentionally, you must know that sham attacks were being made all over the place, that crowds of boats were sunk, and that Thyrsus was a remarkable man if he was not too drunk to have any idea what or whom he was attacking.'

'He was not drunk, he recognized us from a distance, he rammed us deliberately, he tried to murder us when we were in the water.'

'I am sure you exaggerate, Lucius Paetus. I am also sure that Caesar would be impatient with complaints about his hospitality last night even from so distinguished a servant as yourself.'

'I make no complaints. I merely say that Thyrsus, who is a freedman under your control, did his best to murder us.'

'If he is under my control,' said Aulus insolently, 'he cannot have given any grounds for complaint. I am afraid you are prejudiced. Now would you kindly convey my sympathy to Publius Antonius, which was the sole object of my visit.'

But Publius had heard voices and had recognized that of Aulus. Though he had been steadily forbidden to talk and though everyone implored him to be cautious, he insisted on seeing Aulus. He had, he said, an important message for him.

Aulus was most respectful in his address to Publius. He bitterly regretted the accident and had already said so to Thyrsus, who was not, however, to be blamed.

'But Thyrsus,' said Publius, speaking in so low a voice it was difficult to hear, 'tried to kill both Lucius Paetus and Pericles.'

'I think not,' said Aulus. 'It was an accident; he says so himself. In any case Pericles is the slave who flogged the freedman Thyrsus — a performance dangerous to the performer.'

'But at any rate Lucius Paetus has never done Thyrsus any harm.'

'No, he is merely the husband of Metella, which is enough.'

'I am afraid that some day Thyrsus will attack Metella. It was she who ordered his flogging.'

'He will not attack Metella if he values his own life. I have warned him. You need not be afraid, Publius Antonius. I know enough about the record of my fine freedman to be sure that he will not injure Metella, or anyone else whom I order him to leave alone. I'm afraid you were unlucky last night, though he was probably so drunk he could not aim accurately at anyone.'

'Take care that some day he does not take an accurate aim at you, Aulus Cornelius. Such men are dangerous.'

'I know enough about him, Publius Antonius, to dispose of him finally if he disobeyed me.'

Publius's voice had grown feebler and he dropped off into unconsciousness. Aulus disregarded Lucius when he left, but nodded in a friendly way at Pericles and said, 'So you were too proud to take notice of my warning, or was it just stupidity?'

'It was not pride, sir.'

'I thought not. At any rate, don't be as careless about the other thing I told you — to protect your young mistress. If Thyrsus should attempt anything against her — I don't think he will — you can handle him as roughly as you like. I shall support you.'

'Thank you, sir, I shall certainly need support if I do to him what I should like to do.'

Travelling very slowly, so as not to jolt Publius, they got him home at last. They were passed on the way by the Emperor and his train. There was a great array of chariots and horses. It was said that he was intending to celebrate a triumph for his naval victory. Inciting everyone to more and more speed, he imposed

heavy fines on all who could not keep up with him. He declared that he must have money to pay for the entertainment at the bridge. He told his secretaries to find out the names of those who had been drowned; he would then demand part of their estates in order to recompense himself for the cost of the entertainment which, he said, they had tried to spoil. They were also to find out those who had not been drowned and to make them pay because they had thwarted his plans for entertainment.

Publius, lying in his litter, saw the Emperor pass. He thought that this was a great chance to establish personal contact with him. He suggested that they should make all speed to the next halting place, where he thought that he might find the Emperor resting, but at every stage they heard that the Emperor was pushing furiously ahead, declaring that he must get back to Rome because his enemies, especially the Senate and some of the generals, were conspiring against him. Lucius told Publius firmly that they could not hurry; that if he wanted to see his wife and daughter again, he must be content to travel slowly, but if he would do that all would yet be well. Publius was unconvinced and restless until, a few miles out of Rome, they overtook Aulus, whose horse had broken down. When Publius explained that he had wanted to overtake the Emperor Aulus congratulated him on his failure. 'If Caesar,' he said, 'had discovered how you had escaped death he would probably have said that you had tricked him and have had you killed. He is hasty in such matters.'

Publius, having arrived home and gone to bed, seemed to be much better. He was pleased with himself and told everyone the little joke that he had made by applying to himself the famous exhortation of Ulysses — 'Bear up, my heart, thou hast borne much worse than this.' The presence of Caecilia and Metella gave him peace. He liked to talk with his favourite slaves. Pericles was constantly busy bringing one or other of them to tell the Master about his work, and the Master would not cut short the talk in order to receive any visitor, however distinguished. One of the Consuls called when he was discussing some new plants from Germany with the old gardener, Hispo. 'Bring him in,' said Publius, forbidding the gardener to go away. When the Consul entered, 'You're fond of plants, I hope,' he said, 'because we're just in the middle of a most exciting talk.'

'I leave the garden to my wife,' said the Consul, smiling. 'She's the gardener.'

'All right,' said Publius, 'you listen and tell her all about it.' He kept his old servant talking for a long time while the Consul dozed.

But it soon became clear that Publius was losing strength. He could not sit up long, could not sleep well and was quickly exhausted. His doctor Chion forbade him all exertion. 'He forbids me,' said Publius in great good humour, 'to walk or talk, to read or write or listen. He would like me to pretend to be dead while I am still very much alive. When a doctor thinks he has got you in his power you have to be wary, cunning and determined. Chion is a dear fellow, but one mustn't pamper him. I shall spend my last days as I choose.'

'Father' — Metella made light of it — 'you mustn't talk about approaching your last days.'

'You ask Chion!' said Publius with a chuckle. 'He knows, but he has to keep up his reputation for being the most tactful doctor in Rome. He's made a fortune by not telling patients what's wrong with them. He creates such confidence that he can cure some of them by deceiving them. But not me!'

Chion, whose smoothness to his patients contrasted with much pungency of private speech, assured Publius that he was quite wrong about himself. He had only to rest, refuse all effort, sleep a great deal, stop talking and reading, be really obedient — 'now I am serious!' — and he would live for many years. Certainly he might listen but only to short conversations, and they should be such as not to tax his brain. Pericles might read to him on the same condition. If it sent him to sleep so much the better.

Privately Chion told the family that he thought three weeks would be the limit, 'only be careful, because he has no suspicion how ill he is, and that is the best state for a patient.'

'He knows he's dying,' said Metella bluntly.

Caecilia agreed: 'I think that he should be allowed to do exactly what he wants since it can't make much difference except that he would be happier.'

A few days later Publius was worse. No one thought of denying now that he was slowly dying. But when Chion forbade him to sit up at all, Publius addressed him firmly — 'I have to spend

more energy in arguing with you, my good Chion, about sitting up than I should spend if I sat up without arguing. Now don't be tiresome; help me up.'

There came an evening when Publius insisted that he must be raised though all day he had been prone and very weak. They were all there, for Chion had warned them that the end might come suddenly. When Publius said that he was going to sit up and read they looked at each other, not knowing what to do.

Chion appeared to meditate deeply, and then said in a soothing voice, as though he were giving Publius all and more than he wanted — 'Not to-night perhaps. No, I think not to-night. To-morrow, perhaps. Yes, I should say perhaps to-morrow.' 'It might kill him,' he whispered to the others. But Publius just said, 'Caecilia, you understand?' and Caecilia said, 'Yes, of course, my dear, you shall read if you choose.' Publius was raised up against his pillows, and settling back with a happy sigh, he said, 'I shall be the first Antonius to die reading a book. The other Antoniuses would laugh at me, but I've had the best of it.'

Pericles brought him the books he wanted. He would read a little, then doze, and sometimes say a few words to one or other of them. Presently he picked up several of the books, nodded approval over them and handled them lovingly. The very act seemed to give him fresh strength. Then he said, addressing them all but now and then looking at one of them in particular —

'Books have been the saving of me. They've been a sure refuge from the men of action who go round making a mess of the world. Yes, I know; I would have liked to be a big man of action myself — a political reformer, a general, an orator, but I wasn't made for it. I'm too easygoing, too sentimental, and I must tell you' — his eyes smiled — 'not quite the wisehead I have sometimes thought myself. But books have always been my friends, my generous, faithful friends. They never disappoint, never wound or betray. They're always alive, always with you, so that you have friendships that are never broken, that have no fault in them. I couldn't tell you how many, strong and delightful have been my friendships with famous men and woman whom most people foolishly think to be dead, some of them hundreds of years ago, but who are much more alive to-day than most of the men and women who walk about in Rome. They are my

intimates, my confidants, while often the people that I am supposed to know are complete strangers to me.'

Chion patted his hand comfortingly. 'Yes, yes, sir, of course. You've been a great reader. Very fine, too, very fine.' He muttered to Pericles—'He's wandering.'

'He was never more himself,' Pericles said in a fierce, low whisper. Then to Publius—'You've had friends in many countries, sir, and at many times, and have had great adventures with them?'

'Why, I've had a hundred lives and died a hundred deaths, and never regretted a single one of them. And the things that my eyes have seen when I was with those friends. You wouldn't believe!'

'What sort of things, father?'

'Small things and great, Metella. Some were small but not to be forgotten. One day I was on Olympus watching the happy gods, and I saw the crocuses and hyacinths springing up. I swear to you that they were many times as beautiful as any I have seen growing in Italy. The hyacinths had a wonderful, a divine, smell. So they should, of course, since the gods grew them. I can smell them now. I saw the meadow of asphodel, too.'

'But, father, that's in Hades, the nether world.'

'That's exactly, my dear, where I saw it. I was there with Ulysses. I went down with him and heard him talking to the shades of the Heroes. I only listened, of course, but that was something, wasn't it? I saw wonderful things, too, when I was with the Heroes at Troy. Horses, for instance. Do you know that I saw the God of War himself harnessing his steeds, Fear and Dread? I've never been so frightened, but the pleasure was immense. I still wonder what I should have done if he had seen me. I couldn't have run, I was so terrified. I saw the horses of Achilles, too, Xanthos and Balios. They weren't ordinary animals at all. They were born of one of the Harpies and the west wind, so you would expect them to be fast. Oh, they had flesh and blood in them, those horses, not like the sorry nags that crawl about in Rome.'

'Did you see the Trojan horse, sir?' asked Chion, seeking to humour his patient.

'See the horse!' cried Publius, invigorated by this astonishing question. 'My good Chion, I was *in* it. I watched Epeus building

it. I climbed up into it with the Heroes. I heard the awful thud when Laocoon hurled his spear into the horse's side. The Heroes believed that the ambush was discovered and that they were dead men. Most of them were shivering with fright. I was in the horse when the trickster Sinon, who had got himself accepted by the Trojans, came in the dead of night and let the Heroes out. *Saw* the horse? Why, I slid down the same rope as Ulysses. I saw Troy sacked. I saw Priam butchered at his own altars and Aeneas, another dear friend of mine, escaping with his old father on his shoulders while the dread shapes of the gods who hated Troy lowered over the city.'

'You've been very happy with these friends of yours, haven't, you, my dear?' said Caecilia. She held his hand and every now and then he smiled at her and she nodded back at him as he talked.

'Indeed, yes, Caecilia. I've lived with some of the most remarkable people in the world, laughed with them, grieved with them, admired them, feared them. I'll name just two of them for you — the most extraordinary I ever knew, a man and a woman. The woman was Clytemnaestra, the wife of Agamemnon. I knew her very well. I admired her because she was so strange and terrible. Believe me, there wasn't a man on their side at Troy who could compare with that fierce woman. She was iron, she was anything that was harder than iron. She knew no pity and no fear. I was there on the spot, just outside the palace, after Agamemnon and his Trojan captive, Cassandra, had gone in, just back from Troy. Clytemnaestra had gone in with them. Then suddenly there was a shriek of agony, I heard Agamemnon's voice twice over crying that he was stabbed, the door opened, and there were his body and Cassandra's, with his wife standing by. Never shall I forget. Bespattered with his blood she stood up, straight and bold, without shame and contemptuous, and publicly confessed the deed. But it was a few words at the end that have rung in my ears ever since. She pointed to the body. "This is Agamemnon, my husband," she said, "and he is dead, the unquailing work of my right hand, a workman just." With that she looked at the corpse, the Argive citizens who were trembling there, at me, and — you would not believe it but it's true — she said: "That's how it is," as though

she were telling all mankind, and heaven and hell besides, that they would have just to make the best of it. A deed that has echoed through the world ever since, and — “That’s how it is”, she said. As much as anyone I have known except one man she was indomitable.’

‘Who was the man?’ asked Lucius Paetus.

‘The greatest, noblest friend I ever had, the Athenian Socrates. I loved him from the day when I first met him. He was going down to the stream Ilissus with Phaedrus in order to sit and read. He said that if Phaedrus would only hold a book in front of him he would follow him anywhere over the wide world. This was the man for me and after that I never left him. I came as near to worshipping him as I did any man, so honest he was, so pure of heart, so strong.’ Publius stopped a few seconds, then went on. ‘I never forget one day — the proudest and most terrible of my life. I was with Socrates at the end, when the executioner brought him the poison to drink and was ashamed that he should have to do it. I wept with his companions, with them I suffered his affectionate reproach of us for weeping, with them I watched the poison overcome him. When he was dead, though I knew that I was wrong to do it, I wept again and cursed the fools of the Athenian market-place, who had murdered my dear friend.’

He dozed a little. Chion, who had been watching him closely, said in a low voice to Pericles — ‘He’s crazy. Because he’s read a lot of things in books he thinks he was on the spot and himself took part in them. A useful case for doctors!’

Pericles, looking at him with much dislike, was about to retort harshly, but then, seeing that Chion’s tone and look were kindly, he was not angry but said mildly — ‘He *was* there. I know, for often I was with him.’

Chion was about to burst into laughter, but he saw in time that Pericles was serious. So, with slight mockery, he said, ‘You yourself were a friend of Ulysses, I suppose?’

Pericles nodded. ‘Oh, yes. I knew him well. I am not likely to forget him. I was with him and the Master when we met the Cyclops. We were nearly killed.’

‘You don’t say?’ Chion was startled. He muttered to himself — ‘If you ask me, the whole outfit are crazy.’

Publius, hearing the Cyclops mentioned, opened his eyes. ‘I

can tell you we were lucky to get out of that cave alive,' he said. 'I was tied under one of the rams. Ulysses tied them in threes and a man under each one in the middle.' He chuckled. 'I can recall to this day the gritty, greasy wool that I dug my fingers into, and how it smelt so sour that I wanted to sneeze, and how afraid I was of coming loose. And oh, that awful but delicious moment when I felt the great hands of the Cyclops groping about in the ram's fleece. He suspected a trick but he couldn't be sure, Ulysses having blinded him. But we came through, as we came through everything. I was one of the men who were turned into swine by Circe. I was actually one of the swine in the sties and the terrible thing was that we knew all that was going on, and could do nothing. I can't say that I much liked Circe or Calypso, but I didn't dislike them. Even when the people in these books are not, well, wholly reputable, you can't but be friends with them. But those things happened long ago and I've had many pleasanter women for my friends since then.'

'And who were they, sir, may I ask?' said Caecilia, primly.

'Ah, bad Caecilia, you are laughing at me! Who were they? The lovely white-armed Helen, whom men reproached and died for, whom angry Aeneas longed to kill when he saw her cowering at the sack of Troy; Ulysses's brave old nurse; the poor deluded Dido; Lais, the lovely courtesan, for it was I who held the fatal mirror in which she saw her beauty all decayed; Roxane, the captive girl who subdued Alexander; and all the Roman beauties for whom our poets wrote and sighed and wept through sleepless nights — Lesbia and Cynthia, Delia, Corinna and Lalage, who sweetly spoke and sweetly laughed. I knew them all, and their poet-lovers, too. Propertius was always talking to me about his Cynthia: how faithful, how faithless, how she tortured him. I said to him, once, when I became a little impatient because he had been moaning over his sufferings for hours — 'You should not think so much about yourself. You ought to think about Cynthia, if you love her. "That — !" he said brutally, and I admit that sometimes I thought her a bit of a one myself. And then he went on to tell me, weeping bitterly, that he worshipped her, was deceived by her, but could not escape. He knew his fate. When she was faithless to him he determined to gain his freedom once and for all. That way alone, he told himself, lay happiness,

confidence and peace of mind. Sometimes he almost escaped, too, but never wholly. Then, when she was tired of some new love, she would smile at him again, crook her little finger and there he was in a moment back at her feet, humbled, submissive and knowing well, in agony, that in a few months or weeks or days she would again betray him. That was what he hated — the knowledge deep down that he was always being deceived, always resolving to be free, always surrendering to her again, and always to be betrayed once more.'

He dozed again. When he came back his mind picked up the thread. 'I felt for those poor lovers who were shut out in the chill nights and never knew when someone else was being welcomed in their place. Those were fierce loves and unconquerable hates. I'm not sure that sometimes I didn't prefer to be among my friends in Arcady: Phyllis and Amaryllis, Thyrsis and Corydon. I never knew their like, I must confess, in actual life in Italy. They sang and played the pipes, a gentle, cheering game, and never, never did they weep tears of blood like poor Catullus and his fellow-slaves, who twisted passion's knife in their own breasts.'

His voice grew fainter. 'But the women who most have given me a happy life are you — and you' — he indicated Caecilia and Metella. "Caecilia was my first love, Caecilia will be my last." That's Propertius, you know. I expect I've tired you all with my quotations, though Pericles is worse — you're always leading me astray, Pericles — but they're from my special friends. When our neighbour Sextus Pompilius died last year we often recalled his words, and my dear friends in books deserve to be quoted much more than worthy Sextus. In them the dead live, still wise, still beautiful.'

He closed his eyes for a long time. He smiled and his lips moved but no words were spoken. At last he said — 'Dear Socrates was wrong about one thing. He cared only for the city because, he said, only city people could teach him anything. But when I was in the country with him I saw thousands of branches swaying and millions of leaves moving in the breeze like the unnumbered ripples of the laughing sea. They nod and smile, they beckon and warn; to me at least they talk, but then I never had all the deep thoughts that filled the mind of Socrates.'

He held out his hands to Iris and Pericles. 'My dear friends,' he said. He held them out to Lucius and Lollia. 'The two faithfuls!' he said. 'Stand by my wife and daughter.' Then, holding the hands of Caecilia and Metella, 'My dearest Caecilia,' he said, 'My dearest Metella. I thank you both. You have made me very happy. I love you so much.' He looked round recognizing each one of them, greeting them with faithful love. Then his eyes closed.

'He's going to sleep.' Chion's voice was gentle.

Publius opened his eyes again. 'Sleep?' he said. 'Yes, sleep — sweet sleep who is the lord of all gods and all men.'

'Sweet sleep,' said Pericles, 'the brother of death.'

Publius Antonius did not open his eyes again.

They stood silent for some seconds, watching him. Pericles turned and leaned against the wall, covering his face and weeping bitterly. Caecilia touched his arm and said — 'He would not have you weep, Pericles. He did not fear to die.'

'Pericles,' said Metella, 'remember, he was like his friend Socrates.'

'The master wept for Socrates,' said Pericles, 'though I know he would not have me weep for him.' He tried to take a grip on himself, shuddering. Then, as he looked again and saw his master lying dead, he hurried from the room, his sobs convulsing him.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the will of Publius Antonius came to be read he had not freed Pericles. There was nothing in it about freeing anyone. It had been made years before, shortly after Metella was born. No other will could be found, nor was there any reason to think that Publius, much as he had talked, had ever taken steps to make another. He had appointed his friend Vitellius to act as the general heir of his estate and to carry out his instructions. He directed that the estate should be realized, after which one-quarter of his portion was to be delivered to the Emperor Tiberius, the father of his country and protector of bereaved families, while

the remaining three-quarters were to be administered for the benefit of Caecilia and her child Metella. The whole of the slaves were to be sold by public auction, though Vitellius could arrange to buy in any of them whom Caecilia desired to keep. Pericles had not even been bought as a household slave at the time when this will was made and all Publius's assurances about freeing him had come to nothing. 'I think,' said Pericles, 'that perhaps, just as he could not bear to free me in his own lifetime lest I should leave him, so he could not bear the thought of my leaving the Mistress and her daughter and the house after he had gone. I'm sure he always meant to free me when he said he would, but he always had second thoughts and kept putting it off until it was too late.'

'It was selfish of him all the same,' said Lucius Paetus. 'However, Vitellius has the disposal of everything now, and he will manage it. He can buy you for himself, or something like that, and then free you immediately and attach you to Caecilia or to me. All will be well.'

They had wondered whether Aulus would send his condolences or would offer them in person. He came at once. He expressed his regret in the politest manner to Caecilia and Metella. They told him about Pericles and the legacy to Tiberius. He said that he had always believed that Publius would not free Pericles because it had given him so much pleasure to promise that he would. He was pleased to hear about the legacy. The Emperor Gaius, to whom it would now go, would be delighted, he was so wasteful and so short of money; the only doubt was whether he would be satisfied; he wondered if Vitellius ought not to offer more.

Vitellius, being informed of this, said that at all costs they must satisfy Gaius, otherwise he might find an excuse for seizing everything. He would go, he said, and informally consult the Emperor's financial secretary, whom he knew well and trusted. He came back, looking grave. The secretary had been friendly but blunt. The Emperor had emptied the Treasury, had heavy debts and refused to cut down his expenditure. He was imposing enormous fines, holding auctions at which the invited had to buy useless articles at exorbitant prices, getting people condemned and confiscating their fortunes, and preying on the wills of the well-to-do.

In the secretary's opinion Vitellius would do well to surrender a full half of the estate, offering the second quarter as a voluntary tribute from Publius's family to Caesar's justice and moderation. He himself would see that this act of loyalty was brought to the Emperor's notice. In any case, he said, Vitellius could not do anything less, for Gaius had it more and more in mind nowadays that Sejanus had intended to deprive him of power and that some of Sejanus's friends or their families still survived. Vitellius lost no time in letting it be known that he would pay the half.

It was arranged with the auctioneer that Pericles should be knocked down quickly to Vitellius. If by any chance bidding forced the price up, nevertheless the auctioneer was to make sure — and he said there would be no difficulty about it — that Vitellius was successful. They joked with Pericles about his being sold. Someone said how funny it would be if a stranger stepped in at the last moment and snapped him up before the auctioneer could recover from his surprise. Someone reported that recently the Emperor, when holding one of his extraordinary auctions, had seen Saturninus, a man of high rank, falling asleep. A troop of thirteen gladiators were up for sale at the time. Gaius spoke to the auctioneer, who declared a new bid accepted every time that Saturninus nodded, so that when he woke up he found that he had bought the thirteen gladiators and had to pay £75,000.

The auction was held in a large covered hall. There were many slaves to be sold, but it was expected that the sale of Pericles and some others whom Caecilia specially desired to keep would soon be over. Vitellius and Lucius Paetus were present. Metella insisted on attending until Pericles was handed back to them; 'we owe him reparation', she said, 'for this indignity which our carelessness has inflicted on him'.

'The auctioneer's going to put Pericles up first,' said Vitellius, 'and my steward is waiting to make the bid; there'll be no competition.' Pericles was standing quietly, just in front of the crowd of common slaves.

Lucius Paetus gave a sudden 'Hallo!' and 'what does *he* want here? Some mischief, I'll be bound.' The auctioneer was coming out of his office, holding a document in his hand, and with him was Aulus Cornelius. As the auctioneer passed Pericles he said brusquely, 'Stay where you are.' Then he walked rapidly to-

wards Vitellius, who had Lucius and Metella with him; he was followed closely by Aulus, who looked very serious. When the auctioneer reached Vitellius he said respectfully, 'I'm sorry, sir, but something unexpected has happened which I can't help. The slave Pericles has been acquired by the Emperor. This gentleman' — he indicated Aulus — 'has brought the order.' He held up the document. 'It is all in due form. You can see for yourself.' He gave it to Vitellius, who looked at it and handed it on to Lucius. Then he nodded to the auctioneer. 'Quite right. It is not your fault. You can only do as Caesar tells you, and we too, of course,' he added.

Aulus, approaching, had saluted Vitellius and his companions. He was civil and matter-of-fact. 'The Emperor,' he said, 'has decided to take the slave Pericles as part of his share of the estate. He has no desire to take advantage of his position and he has fixed a just price. The estate will not suffer.'

'What does he want Pericles for?' asked Metella angrily. 'How does he know about him? He cares nothing about him.'

'I suppose you put him up to it, Aulus Cornelius,' said Lucius. 'It would be like you.'

'Don't you think it is unwise, Lucius Paetus,' replied Aulus coldly, 'to question Caesar's doings? But with regard to your question, Metella, if I may venture a guess, for I cannot do more, I think that Caesar must have been attracted by the learning, which is almost famous, of this slave, and coveted him as an associate for his own great erudition.'

Vitellius intervened. 'What Caesar desires, Aulus Cornelius, we also desire. I congratulate this slave on his good fortune and I trust that you will tell Caesar of our great satisfaction.'

'With pleasure, Lucius Vitellius.' Aulus smiled as to a fellow-artist. 'No wonder they say that you are the best courtier in Rome. Caesar will be pleased.'

He turned suddenly at the sound of angry voices. Across the hall, close to the stand on which slaves for sale were displayed, Pericles was lying on the floor. He was trying to scramble to his feet and to protect his head with his left arm while over him stood Thyrsus, hitting him viciously with a short, thick club. Thyrsus had appeared suddenly a few moments before when his patron had gone to speak to Vitellius. He had marched straight up to

Pericles. 'So,' he said, 'you are being sold to Caesar, but let me tell you that Caesar is going to turn you over to my patron and me, but before you die — and would you prefer the gladiators or the beasts? — you will pay many times for every one of the strokes that you dealt to me when I was helpless. Like this!' He struck Pericles a violent blow on each cheek. Then, as Pericles rocked on his feet, 'And this,' he said, and with a blow in the face knocked him to the ground. He had just produced the cudgel and was striking at his victim's head, crying, 'Here's your terrible Thyrsus for you', when the auctioneer, followed by Aulus, rushed up. The auctioneer seized Thyrsus by the shoulder and jerked him back bodily, shouting angrily, 'Leave him alone; he's the Emperor's property'. Thyrsus, recoiling, almost fell into Aulus's arms. Aulus set him erect but kept a grip on his arms. 'Have you gone mad?' he said, 'I told you that he was now the Emperor's and that you must leave your revenge to me. What do you think is going to happen to you, and perhaps to me, if Caesar learns — and there are plenty to tell him — that his newly acquired slave was assaulted by you, a freedman of mine whom I could not control, because of your private grievance? In future behave yourself. It would be a pity if I had to go seriously into the question of where you were and what you did before you came to Rome — perhaps I should say "before you escaped to Rome?"'

'I don't know what you mean,' said Thyrsus, but he was startled. His large white face set rigidly, for a second or two hatred and rage showed in his eyes, then, looking straight at Aulus, he said — 'What exactly do you mean, Aulus Cornelius, by "where I was" and "what I did" before I came or escaped to Rome? I have nothing to fear.'

'I congratulate you,' said Aulus. 'You should know best, but all the same, remember what I have said. Don't try my patience too far. This slave belongs to Caesar and I have to deliver him to Caesar safe and sound. If you lay a finger on him again you will find out what I know about your past. Don't risk it. Now you had better go.' Thyrsus turned and was going out, when Aulus said, 'Don't be a fool, man. We've got him, haven't we?' Thyrsus went out, frowning and suspicious. Aulus found Metella beside him. She had come straight from Pericles, to whom she

had been talking; Lucius was still questioning him about what had happened.

'Did you see the amiable Thyrsus?' said Aulus to her, smiling at her as though he and she were wholly in each other's confidence. 'He was almost threatening. And so was I! If he isn't prudent, I shall have to take measures with him. You wouldn't object to that, I think, Metella?'

Metella was regarding him with a steady, unchanging glance. 'Why have you done this?' she said. 'It's not the Emperor. He knows nothing about Pericles. It's you. You've persuaded Caesar, or he's simply told you to do what you like in his name. What do you want Pericles for? I've been asking Pericles and he says that Thyrsus threatened him that he might be made to fight with gladiators or with beasts. Is that true, Aulus Cornelius? It can't be true. Pericles is nothing to you. He's done no harm to you whatever he did to Thyrsus when I ordered him. I'm sure you wouldn't just be cruel without reason. Besides, you wouldn't gain anything by doing Pericles harm. You must know that.'

'Perhaps I might gain something by not doing him harm? You might help there, Metella. But I don't own the man, you know. The Emperor owns him, and will do with him what he likes. He might give him to me. The trouble is this: the Emperor, at least so they say who know him best, is so erratic nowadays that there is no telling whom he will not send into the arena. He picks them at random. He doesn't mind who they are, from slaves to Senators, provided he can see them killed, slowly by preference. He paused—'That is where I come in. I might be able to save Pericles. But that is for you to say. It is in your hands. I mean *he* is in your hands — his life or death.'

'You mean, if I got Lucius to divorce me?'

'Of course that would make everything much simpler. We have spoken of it, you remember. The Emperor has bought this slave to give to me. If you come to me, Pericles will be with you again; nothing could be more satisfactory. If you don't, I can't say what will happen. But don't let's talk about this unpleasant subject. I hate the idea of quarrelling with you. Let's talk of other things. Did you hear what they did in the arena with that brigand chief from Etna? They constructed a tall tower to look like a mountain — Etna, you know. In the top

storey they put the brigand, and in the bottom a tiger. They paraded the tower round the arena and then, stopping it opposite to the Emperor, they pulled a lever, the floor of Etna's storey collapsed and the brigand — but you can see what happened. Let us not think of it.'

'Aulus Cornelius,' said Metella steadily, 'the slave Pericles would cheerfully suffer that before he would desire me to give way to you.'

'Ah, but I wonder whether you would desire him to suffer that if you could save him?'

'I would go to the Emperor myself before such a thing should happen.'

'I think not, Metella, and for the same reason that I haven't yet asked him to make your husband divorce you. Caesar is so capricious about women. He might order Lucius to divorce you, but it might be for his own benefit, not mine. Or he might remove you to his palace without worrying about such trifles as divorce. After all, your father is dead and your husband has no influence. So I don't think, my dear Metella, that you will appeal to Caesar, and neither at present shall I. Later perhaps. And now I must get the slave away to make him presentable for Caesar. Let me know what you decide, Metella. Don't leave it too long, for our good master Gaius Caesar is impulsive nowadays; one day he might make Pericles consul, another day he might throw him to the beasts.' Aulus saluted her courteously and went over to the auctioneer and Pericles. In a few moments he left with the Emperor's new slave.

Aulus did not take Pericles to the Emperor's palace for a few days. The blows had left bruises on Pericles; and some showed on his face. Aulus feared lest the Emperor, noticing, should ask what had happened. When at last he took Pericles to the palace he made no attempt to bring him into the Emperor's presence. He waited till the Emperor should ask about him. One day, while some of them were praising the brilliance of Gaius as an orator, a question arose about oratory which none of them could answer. The Emperor said, 'I don't know, you don't know, no one here knows. We need that learned slave that you were talking about, Aulus Cornelius. What's happened to him? You were to buy him for me. You wanted me to give him, or sell him, to you, I don't know why. You've got some scurvy trick in your

head; you mean him some harm, I'm sure. Where is he now? He ought to be here all the time so that you could present him to me whenever I asked for him.'

'He is here,' said Aulus. 'I've brought him here every morning when I came just in case you should want to see him.'

'Go and get him,' said the Emperor. He began to walk up and down the room impatiently. His thin legs, his heavy body, his meagre and slightly disordered hair gave him the appearance of a scraggy, dishevelled bird. 'I don't want to see the wretched fellow,' he said, 'but Aulus Cornelius ought to have told me he was here as soon as he brought him. It is disrespectful.' His companions hastened to agree.

Aulus came in with Pericles. As Gaius turned, scowling, Aulus said — 'This is the man I bought.' Pericles took one glance at the Emperor, then, advancing a few steps, knelt, turned his face up towards Gaius in a steady look, and bowed his head. It was the same gesture that he had made on the boat near Capreae.

Gaius stared hard, looked towards Aulus, then back again to Pericles. 'The poet!' he said. 'By all the gods, the practical poet! How long ago is it, slave?'

Pericles lifted his head again. 'Seven years,' he said.

Gaius was not listening. He had turned to Aulus, smiling, but not pleasantly. 'So that was the meaning of your trick, Aulus Cornelius. You wanted me to have a little surprise. You knew about my little adventure at Capreae, so you persuaded me to let you buy the slave for me. But I might have thought more of it if you had made a present of him to me. I did not know that you were so poor, Aulus Cornelius. And how did you come to know what happened years ago?' Then roughly to Pericles — 'Have you been boasting, fellow?'

Pericles, who had not bent his head again, replied, 'No, Caesar, I have never spoken of it'.

Gaius turned again to Aulus, who was bewildered by what he heard, realizing that Gaius had somehow encountered Pericles but not knowing what to say.

At last, 'I would willingly have presented the slave to you, Caesar,' he said, 'but I assure you that I neither had nor have any idea of what happened at Capreae except that apparently the slave was so fortunate as to be known to you there.'

Gaius chewed over this, eyeing Aulus morosely. 'If you didn't know, what did you buy him for? I thought all the time that you were going to play him some evil trick, and I think so now. Aulus Cornelius, were you plotting against the man who helped Caesar when he was in danger? Do you not recognize your debt to the slave who perhaps saved the life of Caesar?'

As Aulus began to reply Gaius cut him short, breaking in on his words and saying to Pericles — 'Get up and stand over there'. Then, pointing to him, Gaius addressed the people in the room — 'There is the man who saved Caesar from falling into the sea, who preserved Caesar for an ungrateful Rome!' They loudly applauded, congratulating Caesar on his escape and Pericles on the honour he had had in helping Caesar to it.

'Well,' said Gaius to Aulus, who could not get a word in, 'Why don't you answer me? How long am I to be kept waiting? What was I asking you?'

'Whether I was plotting against this slave, Caesar, and whether I did not realize how much I owe to a man who has saved Caesar's life. I realize it, Caesar, and I have not plotted against him. I did not know what an immense service he had done to me and Rome and all the world. That was my misfortune. But he was up for sale along with all the slaves of Publius Antonius, now dead. He is a man famous for his learning. I thought that as you inherited half of Publius's property the slave should come to you and that, if you did not want him, and were gracious enough to sell him to me, I might keep him for Publius's daughter, who is much attached to him. That is the whole truth, Caesar.'

'You should have told me before now, Aulus Cornelius, about the daughter. This is a new story to me. And what do you say now? Would you propose to keep as a slave the man who saved my life?'

'Indeed, no,' said Aulus. 'If Caesar would sell the man to me I would take care that he was freed on the same day. The people would cry shame if the man who saved Caesar for them remained a slave.'

'The people,' said Gaius with contempt, 'wouldn't mind at all. Some of them would say he ought to be punished because he didn't let Caesar drown. I know their loyalty.'

'I am sure you do them wrong,' said Aulus. 'In any case I pro-

test that this man ought to be freed at once. He has saved one who is Emperor, indeed and more than Emperor, since Emperors are only human.'

Gaius was suddenly mollified. 'That is quite true, Aulus Cornelius. You are right, but he must not be freed by you. No ordinary man can be allowed to be his master or his patron now that it is known what service he did to Rome — greater than any man has done before. I myself shall free him. I shall free him now, so that when he leaves this very room he will be free. You hear that, slave? You are going to be freed at once.' Pericles came up, knelt and kissed Gaius's hands and feet, then rose and waited quietly.

Summoning a secretary, Gaius ordered him to record forthwith that Pericles had been freed. 'And now,' he said, 'what shall we do with you? You're learned, they say, so you will like to be among the books. It wouldn't be much use keeping you here, for I doubt whether you would find the right sort of work to do or like my friends. Most of them don't read anything except the list of charioteers at the races. By all the evidence some of them can't read at all. But I have an idea.' He clapped his hands and spoke to an attendant. 'Fetch my uncle Claudius. He was in the palace not long ago. Bring him here at once.'

Gaius spent the next few minutes marching up and down the room, throwing angry glances to one side or the other, while no one dared to speak to him. Then Claudius came in. He looked nervously at Gaius, then shambled slowly forward, with his head, which seemed to be loosely attached to his shoulders, rolling slightly from side to side as he walked. Gaius regarded him contemptuously.

'You sent for me, I think?' said Claudius. 'I was very busy, nephew, on a most important piece of research into Hannibal's passage of the Alps. I am investigating the effects of the snow in the passes on his African elephants. I would like to get back to my work as soon as possible. I . . .'

'Do you want another freedman?' interrupted Gaius.

'I thank you, nephew, but I have enough already. They give me no peace with their quarrelling.'

'Well, you're going to have another,' said Gaius, pointing to Pericles. 'There he is. He saved my life, so you must welcome

him. You would have grieved if I had died, wouldn't you, uncle Claudius?' He walked up to Claudius and thrust his face close. 'Do you hanker after my position, uncle?' He laughed loudly, looking round for the applause which he received. 'I wonder whether *you* would have saved me from falling into the sea, uncle?'

Claudius was terrified. 'Indeed, yes,' he said, 'and I shall always be proud that I have a freedman who had the honour of helping Caesar when he was in distress.' Claudius's knees were knocking under him; he watched Gaius pitifully.

'Distress!' cried Gaius. 'There was no distress. How dare you say so? I hope you don't mean, uncle, that I who am Emperor of Rome need the services of a wretched slave to save me from falling overboard. The gods protect their own.' He looked malevolently at Pericles.

'I fear,' said Aulus, seeing an opportunity, 'that the slave must have spread the impression that his help was necessary. And, of course, his help was not really needed at all. You, in your own person, could have overcome all difficulties. The slave is very fortunate to be allowed the credit for coming to the aid of Caesar, but that is no reason why he should presume to boast of it.'

But Gaius transferred his anger to Aulus.

'You are determined to do the slave harm, aren't you, Aulus Cornelius? You want me to condemn him because he ventured to assist someone who, in truth, sharing in the nature of the gods, needed no aid. Take the man away, uncle. I was minded for a moment to punish him for presuming to think I needed help, but now I am sure that he should be rewarded since Aulus Cornelius clearly wants him punished.'

Claudius made a sign to Pericles and they withdrew. Gaius laughed again and slapped his thigh as Claudius shuffled out — 'It's lucky for me that he's half-witted, otherwise the half-witted mob might take to him. Don't look so gloomy, my good Aulus. I can see through you, though I wish I knew what you wanted the poet-slave for, but you won't tell me.' He went to Aulus and put his arms round his shoulders. 'Don't try to deceive Caesar. He'll always be too much for you. Now you can go.' He gave Aulus a friendly push, then seized him suddenly by the shoulder, twisted him round and said with an ugly frown — 'Why don't we

see your father here in these days? Where does he hide himself? Doesn't he like us? Oh, never mind. But he was a relative of Sejanus, wasn't he? That's why he was exiled. I know, but don't let that keep him away. We're forgiving people here. It doesn't matter.' He turned away, and, as Aulus passed through the door, shut it abruptly on him.

As Aulus went through one of the smaller rooms he passed Claudius and Pericles. He suavely congratulated Pericles on his change of fortune and Claudius on his freedman. 'I give you one piece of advice,' he said to Pericles. 'Keep out of Caesar's sight and pray that he will forget you.'

'It is equally sound advice for me,' Claudius said to Pericles when Aulus had gone. Then he questioned Pericles closely about his history and the events by which he had come into the Emperor's hands; it was soon plain that the frightened Claudius suspected that Pericles had been set to spy upon him. When at last Claudius was convinced that he had nothing new to fear he almost wept. When he discovered also that Pericles had a passion for books and was long trained in their study he hurried him off to his own library, saying that there was an immense amount of research to be done, that he would soon put Pericles in charge of the library slaves, and that under no circumstances was Pericles to show himself anywhere near Gaius Caesar. .

'May he not remember about me and ask what I am doing?' asked Pericles.

'It may be so,' said Claudius, 'or he may never mention you again. You have been serving my friend Publius Antonius all these years, I gather? Then I shall trust you. No one knows what Caesar will do nowadays. Sometimes he forgets and sometimes he remembers, but no one knows what he may not remember and whether he is not forgetting deliberately until the day comes when he is ready to remember for his own purposes. But I think you may escape him by being attached to me because he despises me and forgets about me except when he is holding me up to ridicule.' Claudius smiled wearily at Pericles. 'I will let you into a great secret, because you, like Publius Antonius and me, love books. I am not really quite so simple as I look. But never tell anyone; let it be a secret between you and me. I am only safe as long as I am stupid.'

Day after day Lucius Paetus and Metella, Caecilia and Lollia had discussed what could be done for Pericles. Eventually it had been decided that Lollia should visit Aulus and try, by whichever means seemed most expedient, to get him to promise his aid in freeing Pericles. She arrived at his house on the morning after the Emperor had handed over Pericles to Claudius. Aulus greeted her cordially. 'Now what enterprise have you in hand, Lollia Claudia?' he said. 'Something audacious, I've no doubt. Trust you for that! I make a guess. You have come provided with money to buy Pericles back again. Just as I bought him for Caesar, now I am to persuade Caesar to re-sell the slave to me, and I am to re-sell him to Lucius Paetus? Isn't it so?'

'Clever boy,' said Lollia. 'Yes, more or less correct. At least we want to get Pericles back again without harm coming to him.'

'You can't,' said Aulus, 'he's free. He's out of my clutches, and you can't lay hands on him either. He has been given by Caesar to the eminent Claudius instead of being thrown to the wild beasts by me. I would have done it, you know, if Metella had gone on refusing me. Oh yes, I would, whether you believe it or not, because it would perhaps have made her more compliant next time I went to her. And now he's safe in the library of that old dotard Claudius.'

'He's not a dotard,' said Lollia, 'he's very intelligent, and he's not old. He's not fifty. I'll tell you this — the people like him a great deal better than they do Gaius.'

'They'd better keep their likings to themselves, then, or Gaius will have them torn limb from limb. But, of course, people say they like Claudius. He's a joke, a poor drivelling oaf and everyone's sorry for him. Except Gaius, I mean. Why, he's not all there, and never has been.'

'Is Gaius Caesar all there, as you call it?'

'Caesar? He's mad! I think he's pretty far gone, and getting worse. But he's not too far gone to help me to get what I want with Metella, when the time comes. I can manage him. Lollia, you warn Metella. I may have to take some risks with Caesar, but, if she won't budge, I'll take them. If I fail, she'll pay for it as well as me. If she won't be warned by me, she may listen to you.'

'If she listens to me, she won't yield to you. You have queer ideas, my dear boy. I am anxious about you. Good-bye.'

PUBLIUS was dead and Pericles no longer lived in the house on the Esquiline. Nevertheless Lucius and Metella knew more now of what was going on in Rome, of what was done and said and feared, than ever before. Lucius himself and Lollia heard of all that Gaius was doing to the nobility, the Senators, and especially to the rich to make himself hated. Pericles, who had soon become a favourite with Claudius, the learned author of many histories, brought strange, unpleasant stories of what went on in Caesar's palace. Tullus, the pasty-cook cousin, and his wife described the growing enmity between the Emperor and the citizens of Rome who had once shouted for him. They knew what all classes were saying, for their business had flourished — thanks, as Lollia declared, to her patronage — so that they had taken over the wine-shop next door, and now had rich as well as poor for customers. The hostility of the Roman crowd showed itself openly at the Games, that test of popular favour, and if the mob still fought for the gifts which Caesar threw to them, they sneered when the story went about that he had been heard to say that he wished they had but one neck. 'And how many necks does Caesar think he has himself!' they growled to one another. From the palace the story came that more and more Caesar was convinced he was a god. He had married his mistress Caesonia when she was eight months pregnant, so that at her delivery he could point out that he, the divine, had produced a child in a few weeks. When he laid the infant on the knees of the statue of Juppiter some said he meant that her real father was none other than the god, but others thought that it was only a case of one god modestly commending his offspring to the greatest god of all. The assumption of the divine attributes, so Pericles reported, had become a passion with Caesar. He dressed himself up first as one god and then as another. His courtiers, secretly contemptuous but always adulatory, sometimes angered him by not being sure what god he was, while the Senate did not know what honours to offer him, since being a god he was furious that any human being should presume to confer honours on him, and, being human, was angry that the honours offered

were so small. His intimacy with the other gods was so real as to embarrass the spectator. He would talk privately to the image of Juppiter in a touching and sometimes frightening manner. Or, not content with inviting the moon to come down to his bed, he would call on those around to declare that they saw her there. Or, dressing himself up in one of Juppiter's well-known disguises, he would visit this, that or the other woman in the palace, summoning her to yield herself to the great god, the amorous, irresistible seducer. This assumption of divinity, though accepted by some of the women with respect, and by others with celerity, was unpopular with men.

The prudent officials with whom Lucius kept company laughed at these stories, but they shook their heads over the reckless plans with which Gaius sought to satisfy the cravings of his unstable mind. Convinced that he was great beyond the greatness of an Alexander or a Julius, he felt he must prove it by the execution of works not less imposing than theirs. He embarked on the most grandiose constructions at the cost of an emptying treasury which no device of tyranny, though he tried them all, could fill.

As the summer of the year drew to an end there were stories of plots against his life. Whether they were genuine or invented, they were paid for with the lives of some of the chief men in the State. Lepidus, one of Gaius's intimates, the husband of his sister Drusilla and the lover, so it was charged, of her two sisters and now co-plotter with them, was put to death. Gaius dedicated to the temple of Mars the Avenger the three daggers which the three conspirators, he said, had aimed against his life. But a plot, to be successful, must have military power behind it. This, it was whispered, was why Lentulus Gaetulicus, the commander of the legions on the German frontier, was condemned to share the fate of Lepidus. The conspiracy, if any, was suppressed, but the causes which produced it were unchecked. His advisers, seeing that he grew more and more unpopular, suggested foreign conquests and military triumphs as the way to win back the popular favour. Let Caesar strike deep at the German tribes; let him carry out the conquest of Britain, long promised, long delayed; let him drown his unpopularity in the military glory which no people could resist. The news spread that Caesar would soon be on the march to Gaul, to Germany, to Britain. It was every-

where welcomed, both by those who hoped to gain by being with him in the field and by those who welcomed the relief that would be given by his absence from Rome. The youth of the nobility exulted that there was to be a war at last. They pressed forward to seek service on the staffs of the generals in the field or as their personal attendants. Metella at this time met Valeria, the wife of Marcus Calpurnius and mother of the boy Quintus, now nearly sixteen years old.

'Is Marcus going to the front, Valeria? I heard that he was to command a legion.'

'Yes, Caesar has promised him.'

'And Quintus — he's going, too, I suppose, to be in attendance on his father? It will be a great day for him, and for his father, too, I'm sure. You must both be proud of Quintus. He's a born soldier, isn't he?'

'No, my dear, we've had a bitter disappointment. Marcus couldn't take Quintus with him, of course. That would have looked like favouritism — father and son, you know. But Marcus got a great friend of ours, who commands another legion, to promise to take Quintus, and that would have meant quick promotion; besides, he promised to present Quintus to Caesar as soon as he got the chance, and who knows what that might lead to? The boy would have been made for life. And then a dreadful thing happened. Quintus said that he didn't want to go to the army in Gaul, that he didn't like fighting, and that he wouldn't go, whatever was done to him. My husband could scarcely believe his ears. "My son," he said, "and a Calpurnius!" I was out of the house on the morning when this happened and, Metella, when I went back I found my husband in a chair, doubled up and rocking himself to and fro, as though in pain. I thought that he had been taken suddenly ill. Then I heard him moaning, and he kept on moaning it over and over again, "My son, and a Calpurnius!"'

'You do surprise me,' said Metella. 'I thought Quintus was going to be a great soldier. He was always fond of killing, wasn't he?'

'That's what we hoped,' said Valeria dismally. 'Marcus is terribly ashamed, and so am I. Quintus is quite brazen about it. He says he takes no interest in fighting, that he doesn't want to

kill anyone, and that even if he did once play with toy soldiers, he's got over all such childish games by now. That's how he talks, and it infuriates my husband. He can't bear it when Quintus tells him that he's got something better to do with his time.'

'And what's that?' asked Metella, trying to look concerned.

'You won't believe it,' answered Valeria, 'but he wants to spend all his time in studying Greek art and vases and temples and all that sort of thing. Really it's hard to understand. As my husband says, what do we keep all these clever Greek and Syrian slaves for if we have to study art ourselves? You wouldn't believe what happened the other day. You know we have betrothed Quintus to Flavia, the daughter of Lucius Vitellius, your father's friend? We couldn't have chosen a better family, could we? They're all consuls and ex-consuls and generals, and we were sure that she would have a good influence on Quintus. Well, the other day my husband gave Quintus a military manual, together with all the bricks needed to make a legionary camp. He told him to study the book and build the camp. When he came back a few hours later he found Flavia there. Quintus had never touched the manual at all. They were surrounded by Greek vases, some of which Quintus had collected in our house and some she had brought from hers — two slaves had carried them — and she and Quintus were discussing the scenes depicted on the vases — what god this was, whose altar that was, who was the artist, and where was the vase made and how long ago. She's as bad as he is. That wasn't the worst, either. They had used the bricks of the camp to build a lot of useless Greek temples. Marcus had given Quintus some very special bricks for the Praetorium, the general's headquarters, and — would you believe this? — we found that Marcus and Flavia had used them to make the drains below the group of temples. Marcus said it was indecent. And now, of course, Caesar has gone or is going to Gaul and Germany, and Quintus is throwing away a golden chance.'

'Well, you always said he was to have a free choice, Valeria.'

'Certainly, my dear — perfectly free, so long as he chose the right things. Then there wouldn't have been any difficulty. Marcus says it makes one despair of education. He says that if we had had Quintus taught nothing at all he might have become

a famous general like Marius, who was a ploughboy and very ignorant. I can't quite see that myself, because his enemy Sulla, who was an even better general, was well educated, so one doesn't know what to think. It's very difficult. At all events, we did all we could for Quintus and now we get no thanks. We tried to make the boy like soldiering, and he turns against it and becomes a milksop. But if we'd told him to despise soldiering, hoping that he would do the contrary, I expect we should have been wrong; he would have been a milksop just the same. My husband is very bitter about it. He says that what he resents is that it's so ungrateful. He says there's no telling where this sort of thing will end. My husband doesn't actually say it, because he's naturally reserved, but I know that secretly he fears that Quintus may become a sculptor or a painter or something of that kind. That would be terrible for Marcus. They've never had anything like that in his family. He says himself that it wouldn't be so bad if Quintus were just a poet or a historian, because Augustus wrote a poem on Sicily and Julius Caesar wrote history books. He wouldn't like it to go beyond that. You know,' Valeria went on in a burst of indignation, 'I sometimes wonder if boys like Quintus aren't turned against the army by having to read so much Caesar at school, but when I suggested that to Marcus he said that I knew nothing about it. It really is very difficult.'

At the Circus, the Senators and Knights talked of the Emperor's doings in the north. Among those whom they could trust they were politely sceptical about him, otherwise greatly reserved. 'What news of Aulus?' said one of them to Sextus Cornelius. 'He's at Caesar's headquarters, isn't he? That sounds good to me.'

'It doesn't to me,' said Sextus. He could not contain himself. 'If my son's there, he'll find himself with a mob of actors, women, charioteers, gladiators and the like. What right have they to be there at all when there's supposed to be a serious war?'

'Doesn't Aulus send you any news, Sextus Cornelius? It's hard to know what's happening.' It was Vitellius asking. He and Sextus were sitting next to one of the flights of steps by which spectators ascended to their seats.

'Yes, Aulus says that they've been raiding German tribes and have come out again. Caesar will want a triumph for it. They intended to conquer Britain, but the weather in those seas is bad,

and they no sooner started off than they turned back. Another triumph for that, I expect?’

They stopped talking to watch a chariot race. There was bitter rivalry between the faction of the Blues and that of the Greens. The Blues had a driver racing who had already won forty-nine victories. He was Ariston, who had among his horses the famous Vindex. The crowd was tumultuous at the prospect of his fiftieth victory, some applauding him, some crying him down, each side attacking the other with noisy insults. Early in the race Ariston’s whip flew out of his hand at a sudden lurch of the chariot and came down on one of the Green horses which was running almost parallel. It was the merest accident and the horse only went the faster, but the Green partisans were beside themselves with fury, shouting that Ariston had thrown his whip with foul intent. He must get his fiftieth victory, they said, treacherously; that was the way he had won most of the other forty-nine. As the chariots made the sharp turn at the end of the course — the supreme test of skill — a Green driver, turning too sharply, sent his chariot up on one wheel, and all but crashed into Ariston. This too was accident and imperilled the Green himself as much as the Blue. But an immense hubbub arose. The Blues hurled imprecations at the Greens. They knew it was a wicked plot to wreck Ariston and they knew who was at the bottom of it. Who always favoured the Greens? Caesar! Who put them up to their perpetual tricks? Caesar! Who corrupted the judges, who bribed the stablemen, who had tried to poison the drivers of the Blues in order to make quite sure that the Greens should win? Caesar! Caesar! The same Caesar who had had citizens bludgeoned for no reason at all and who, luckily for himself, was not there to-day. They shouted and brawled and fought, they sweated and stank and bled. The voice of the people was unmistakably against Caesar.

‘You’ve heard,’ said a Senator, ‘that he’s holding the most extraordinary auction sales? You know that he’s sent for a lot of stuff out of the palace in Rome, some of it belonging to the sisters he banished and a lot of it rubbish? He’s selling it at fantastic prices to the Gauls and, of course, to anyone else whom he can persuade or force to attend the auctions. I hope he’ll make enough money in that way to spare us when he returns.’

'You've heard, I suppose,' said a colleague, 'that he has refused to receive the deputation that we sent him? There'll be trouble for us when he comes back, you mark my word.'

Ariston won the race while the crowd demonstrated wildly against the Greens and the Emperor.

'It's a good thing he's not here,' said Vitellius, 'he'd order a massacre.'

'He'll order one anyhow when he hears of this,' retorted Sextus. 'I'd sooner have Tiberius Caesar back again even if he did banish me. Him at least I could respect, but it affronts me to have this man for king. He added in a low voice to Vitellius, 'we should have been much better off with Sejanus than with a madman'. Vitellius shook his head warningly, but Sextus was stubborn. 'Well, he *is* mad,' he said, 'and a mountebank.' He was going on, but Vitellius resolutely talked him down. 'Ariston's victory is good news for Lollia Claudia,' he said. 'She promised to give a banquet to-night in honour of his fifty victories if he won to-day.'

'Will she invite the horse, too?' said Sextus sourly. 'You know, of course, that just before he went away Caesar invited the horse Incitatus to be his guest at a palace dinner and fed him sumptuously? I was told that he wanted to have the horse on the dining couch with him and when the horse refused, was for cutting his throat. Why?' — Sextus raised his voice in his indignation — 'they say that he's talked of making the horse Consul. That's what Rome's like to-day! To tell the truth —'

'Don't,' said a precise, mocking voice. They looked up. Pontius Pilate, on his way up the steps to his seat, had stopped to greet them and had overheard. He passed on, but after going up two or three steps he turned back and bent over Sextus and Vitellius, speaking to Sextus. 'I'm surprised at you, Sextus Cornelius. I tried to tell the truth and lost my job. You tell the truth' — his voice was a pleasant whisper — 'and you'll lose your life. Tell lies and you'll live to be Consul' — he paused — 'along with Incitatus! Besides' — he patted Sextus's shoulder affectionately — 'there's a difficulty. What is truth, Sextus Cornelius?' He winked gravely at Vitellius and climbed up to his seat.

Vitellius looked after him. 'It's a good thing they didn't leave him in Palestine,' he said to Sextus. 'He was killing the Jews very fast.'

'There'd be fewer of them in Rome, Lucius Vitellius.'

'There's a new fanatical sect among them, I believe. They say it's turned up in Rome now.'

'The worse for Rome,' said Sextus.

Lollia and Metella heard the strangest stories from another source. They had gone to Tullus's wine-shop. There was a door through into the pastry shop and customers were passing from one shop to the other and stopping to chat in both. Tullus was posted behind the counter in the wine-shop. Lollia and Metella were sitting in chairs with their feet on stools, listening. There was the wildest gossip about the Emperor and his doings. It began when a customer congratulated Tullus on his good fortune.

'You're supplying the palace now, I hear? I'm told you've ordered a mural painting for your shop and that it shows your wine being drunk by the Emperor — of course by his permission. There's glory for you! And we humble people can't get from you the wine we want because it's all gone to the palace! Favouritism, I call it. The new customer gets all the best wine because he's the Emperor.' Then, hastily — 'Well, of course, so he should. I didn't mean anything else. Are you sending wine to him in Gaul? That will cost a pretty penny, I'm sure. When's he coming back — does anyone know?'

'No,' said another, 'no one has any idea. But you know that deputation that the Senate sent to him? Did you hear what Caesar did with them? He told them to go back home again and at the same time he threw poor old 'uncle Claudius' into the river. It's true. There was a Senator had a letter about it. A friend of mine saw it. There's no doubt about it.'

'What river?' said a curmudgeon of a customer. 'And what Senator?'

'I don't know,' was the answer. '*The river* — that's what the letter to the Senator said — the river that he threw his uncle into, of course. My friend knows the Senator, he's known him for twenty years.' He looked angrily at the sceptic. 'It was all in the letter. There's no doubt about it.'

Tullus broke in. 'He's going to have a triumph, I'm told, when he comes back to Rome.'

'What for?' asked the disagreeable man.

'He's conquered some German tribes, they say, but I'm told

the German prisoners are really friendly Gauls whom he 'paid to dye their hair red in order to make them look like Germans.'

'My brother,' said another, 'is in one of his legions. I've just heard from him. He says that when Caesar announced that he was going to conquer Britain he ordered some of the legions down to the beaches. My brother wasn't there himself, but he knows soldiers who said they had spoken to some of those who were, and he says there's no doubt that Caesar ordered the troops to collect shells in order to prove to the people of Rome, when he had his triumph, that they had visited the utmost Ocean. They say that a Senator's going to propose that he should be 'Ruler of the Sea' instead of Neptune. Beside the shells he's going to bring some of his ships overland to Rome, so that there'll be no doubt he went to Britain. There's proof for you!'

'Is it Caesar you're talking about?' said a newcomer. 'My brother's just come back from Gaul. He was going about in his own carriage and one morning he found that it was missing. He was warned that he had better go to Caesar's auction to recover it, and take some money with him. He had to buy it back — it cost him £500, and suddenly Caesar asked him if he had a special licence to use such a carriage in Gaul. When he said no, Caesar said that he would have to pay £500 for the licence and that, as a great favour, he would not be fined another £500 for his offence. You know, I suppose, that after Caesar had refused to receive the Senate's deputation, he executed his uncle Claudius? No, he didn't throw him in the river — that's a childish rumour — he executed him. My brother is positive. Oh, yes, he saw the execution himself, so it must be true.'

Lollia Claudia told Tullus that most of these stories were untrue, that uncle Claudius was to her knowledge alive and well, and that he ought to stop such things being said. 'I might as well shut up the shop,' he said. 'You can't prevent these stories. Everyone feels that even if they're not true they very well might be.' He dropped his voice. 'There's not one in a hundred who comes into my shop,' he said, 'who wants Caesar to come back to Rome.'

'But he's coming back,' said Lollia, 'and then I think we shall see things. All I can say is that if we are to have a god over us it's a pity that he should have the subhuman qualities of the worst Claudians.'

In April — it was now the year 40 by the Christian reckoning — Metella had a second child, a girl whom they called Antonia. She had spent the winter at the same farm near Antium where she had lived before Young Publius was born and where Thyrsus had been flogged for his attack on Iris. She had hoped that nothing would be known outside her family and her friends until the child was born. She was afraid that the news would get to Aulus. She felt sure that he would not accept it as quietly as he had had to accept the birth of Publius. Before they left for the farm Iris reported to her that one of the slave girls in the household at Rome had been boasting that she had a freedman for her lover. From the description there was little doubt who this freedman was. When the girl came to be questioned, it was soon evident that it was Thyrsus and that he had used her to keep himself informed about every detail in the life of the household where she worked. She had told him all she knew about Pericles and his new master and had been puzzled by the sullen ferocity with which he listened to stories of the prosperity that Pericles now enjoyed. She had told him what she could, which was little, about Lucius; he had asked her innumerable questions about Lucius's habits of life, his companions and opinions, and he seemed, she said, disappointed with what she told him. She had also told him everything that she knew about Metella: when it had first become known to the household that she was going to have another child, when she was going to the farm, how often Lucius was expected to be there, when the child would be born, what its name was to be according as it was boy or girl, where she would be living after its birth, and who would look after it. When the girl asked why he should ask so many questions about a matter that could not closely interest him, he had told her that Aulus Cornelius, his patron, was really entitled to marry her mistress, his place having been usurped years before by Lucius Paetus, and that Aulus would therefore be immensely interested in hearing that Metella was to have another child who would not be his. The girl was so much excited by this story that as soon as she got back home, she began to tell her fellow-slaves about it. Thus she came to recite all that she had told to Thyrsus. It was apparent that Aulus would soon know as much as anyone, and more than most, about Metella. If Thyrsus had tormented

the jealous imagination of Aulus at the birth of the first child by suggesting to him the felicities of Lucius and Metella he would enjoy doing it now with still greater malignity, being newly embittered against his patron.

Aulus wrote to Metella in July from Gaul —

‘So it is war between you and me at last. It needed this last news about you to teach me what I have to do, and to do without more delay. You think, because I only wrote letters from Cyprus and only talked in Antioch, that I don’t know my own mind, that I won’t run risks, that I lack the spirit to act, to do, to strike, or perhaps you think that I love you so much that, whatever I suffer, I shall never bring myself to hurt you. Or you think that because I botched my scheme for Pericles, I can be relied on to botch everything, even if I ask for Caesar’s aid. (May he long remain our chief, in good health and victorious!)

But you are wrong. You will find that you are wrong. Thyrsus has told me everything. Of course he is a knave, a liar, I know that well. Of course he may have told me more than there is to tell, but it makes no difference; I believe everything that he tells me provided that it is horrible enough. He hates me because I know too much about him, because I have threatened him, and he delights to torture me by talking about you, the wife of Lucius. Why not stop him? you say. I tell you that twenty times a day I resolve that I will listen to him no more, that I will stop him; that I will not have him near me so that I shall not be tempted to listen; that I will send him back to Rome; that I will fly to Rome myself; that I will kill him the next time he says, smiling and sneering, that anyone in Rome can see with half an eye that you are going to have a child, another child, by another man than me. Yes, I resolve, and so we talk of other things, remote from you and Rome. He watches me out of his little fat eyes, slyly, with the hint of a smile, because inside he is saying “You don’t care a button for what we’re talking about; all you want, and I know it, is to hear about Metella and her husband-lover Lucius”. So at last I bring the talk round to Rome and you. I cannot bear any longer not to hear about you. But at first

he holds off, then I ask him more directly, because I must, and he tells me — everything. You see, I know that I am to be tortured. I make him torture me, but even he cannot torture me as I torture myself. And to you, what am I? A poor, persistent fool, whom too much love has made a weakling both in action and in mind? It is not so, and it shall not be so. So, it seems, it is war. I have given you warning, and time enough. For the last time, I remind you of what I said when Sejanus was — what shall I say? — so justly recompensed by Tiberius Caesar for his treachery — that you were pledged to me, and to me you must come. I withdrew nothing of my claims then and I say now that they must be fulfilled. You know what your husband has to do. I have no enmity against him except that if he keeps me from you he must be removed. Explain this to him since he does not seem to know. He must give way. I shall see you once more before I act, because what I mean to do might have results for you as well as for your husband, for which I should be sorry. (Caesar, in spite of his many divine qualities, is an impulsive creature.) Therefore, if need be, I would make one last effort to persuade you. But do not say to yourself, "More talk! How you do talk, Aulus Cornelius!" Because, talking is over and doing has arrived.'

Metella showed this letter to Lucius, but there was nothing that they could do except wait for the return to Rome of the Emperor and of Aulus. Lollia Claudia tried to cheer them by saying that they might hear any day that Aulus had fallen out of favour and that if he tried to turn Caesar against Lucius his advice would probably have the contrary effect. When Gaius arrived in Rome, however, at the end of August, Aulus was not with him. He had been left behind to collect some of the moneys which the Emperor had extorted from his subjects but which, in whole or in part, they had so far been unable to pay. It was agreed, however, that at the moment there were few who stood higher than Aulus with the Emperor. Those who came with the Emperor to Rome said that provincials who wanted something from him went first of all to Aulus Cornelius, who could give or deny access to his master, and without whose support they could do nothing.

Gaius returned to Rome morosely hostile to the Senate. Even while he was in Gaul he had reprimanded them (and the people as well) because they were watching the plays in the theatres and amusing themselves in other ways while he and his men were suffering the hardships of war. Some, however, believed that the cause of his anger was that the Senate had not offered him the divine honours which he expected. Vitellius told with much enjoyment how the Senators, determined to please Caesar at all costs, had voted that he should sit on a high platform in the Senate-house, and also have a guard. A guard, said Vitellius, to protect him against his faithful Senators! Vitellius jested, but he was serious about the Emperor's recklessness in alienating the army. 'He won't listen to advice any longer. That's what's the matter with him. His advisers know well that at all costs he must please the army. If the army turns against him he is lost, and yet here he is dismissing senior officers and cutting down the amounts that are due to veterans after the period of their full military service. That can't go on. Even if he were twenty times as good as he is bad he would need a loyal army in order to put down any rivals with legions at their back and to suppress, if need be, the undisciplined mob. But now, while everything he does arouses grievances, he begins to destroy the one weapon which might have saved him. The day is coming when he will have no friends.'

When Aulus returned, at the beginning of December, he found Rome full of expectation, though no one knew what precisely was expected. There were those who hinted of conspiracies and asked darkly 'How long?' There were those who said publicly that the Emperor was divine and privately that he was completely mad. He himself was more certain than ever that he was a god. Indeed he acted the god more than the ruler. He drove the Jews of Judaea to frenzy by directing that his statue should be installed in the Temple at Jerusalem. He ordered that the famous statue of Juppiter at Olympia should be transported to Rome and have an image of his own head put on it. There were rumours that he would soon leave Rome in order to announce himself to the credulous East as very god.

For a few days after Aulus had returned he was constantly at the palace, giving an account of his stewardship in Gaul. Then,

one morning, a slave called with a note for Metella. It contained a few lines in which Aulus asked her to fix a place and time for meeting him, 'for the purposes described in my letter'. He hoped that there should be no great delay, and she should come alone. Lucius, as always, insisted that he ought to be present when the meeting took place, and he did not like Metella's opposition. The most important thing, she said, was to find out exactly what Aulus proposed to do, what weapons he thought he had in his hands; and how he proposed to move the Emperor to give him what he wanted without running the risk that Metella herself might be in danger from the Emperor's savage caprice. If it was proposed that Lucius should be present Aulus would certainly refuse; if Lucius nevertheless appeared, no one could make Aulus disclose his intentions. Metella, failing to convince Lucius, though he agreed that she must do what she thought best, found some consolation in Iris who, sagely assenting, declared that in such an issue it was best to meet the man singly face to face provided always that at the start he did not take you by surprise. Metella sent back word that she would meet Aulus on the next morning at Tullus's in the Suburra. Iris, having taken the message, went on to Tullus's, where it was arranged that Aulus and Metella should meet in the living-room.

Tullus and Norba his wife knew all about the fortunes of Lucius and Metella. They had feared that Lucius would be prevented from marrying Metella. They dreaded lest Aulus should carry out his threat to ruin the happiness of their friends. They knew about Aulus's attempt to get possession of Pericles, and about the violences of Thyrsus. Simple people, they often said to one another that they wished they had the handling of Aulus and his freedman, nor were they more ferocious in language than in intention. When they heard that Aulus was coming to use their premises in order to force Metella to yield they showed impatience. The cousin said that he would give Aulus a glass of drugged wine, which would put him to sleep until nightfall, and then drop him into the Tiber. 'He's earned it better than any of those I've seen tipped in the river,' he said, 'and some of them pretty rascals.' His wife, however, said that justice was not enough; they must be practical. Aulus deserved all that her husband said and more, for a painless death after a nice drink of wine was much too good for

him. But it would be risky; he was a friend of the Emperor, and 'until we get rid of Caesar — and the sooner the better in my opinion, which I'm not going to conceal from anybody — it's not safe to throw his friends into the river. What we have to do is to make sure that when Aulus comes to-morrow he doesn't hurt Metella or try to kidnap her. He may have that fellow Thyrsus somewhere near with a gang of slaves. When he and Metella have been talking a short time, my dear' — this to her husband — 'you'll carry in two glasses of wine and take your time about it so as to see how things are looking. After that I'll go in and ask if they would like some more. Every now and then I'll send the younger children up the stairs to talk and clank about — they're good at that — so that in the room they'll hear the noise and Aulus will know that there are people about the place, ready to go in. And you and I' — she said to Iris — 'you'll be coming with your mistress, won't you? — yes, I knew you would, of course — we'll sit on the stairs and talk, and now and then we'll raise our voices and Metella will hear and it will give her confidence.'

'She has plenty of confidence,' said the cousin, 'and I think my plan is much tidier.'

'It isn't practical,' insisted his wife, 'and it must be good for Metella to know we're waiting nearby, ready to help. And if that Thyrsus has the impudence to show himself here, he's going out into the street again quick and sharp — isn't he, Iris?'

Iris nodded, but 'He won't come,' she said, 'Aulus Cornelius is managing this all by himself. He won't have Thyrsus in it.'

'Do you think so?' said the cousin's wife, much disappointed.

When Aulus arrived Metella was already there. He was going upstairs unannounced when Tullus appeared, greeted him and led the way. Aulus asked politely after Tullus's wife, and how was the wine-shop doing and was it true that he was thinking of taking over a third shop also for the sale of cosmetics? Arriving at the room, they found Iris and Norba sitting with Metella. 'Ah,' Aulus said to Iris, 'still being useful to your mistress? That's right.' He asked Norba about her children, and received very cold replies. When Norba withdrew with Iris, she told Metella loudly to call out if she wanted anything because both of them would be quite close at hand. Aulus laughed and said — 'She doesn't like me. I believe she thinks that I'm going to murder

you and she's sitting on the stairs ready to rush in as soon as she hears the shrieks. I'll have a look.'

He went to the door and on to the landing and came back laughing. 'Correct!' he said. 'I'd no idea I was right. They're really there — Iris and the shop wife. Their ears are growing longer every minute.'

'Perhaps they know what you wrote to me,' said Metella. She had no intention of sitting still mildly, waiting to be attacked. 'Why did you write that nonsense about it's being war at last? If it comes to that, it's been war for over nine years so far as you are concerned, hasn't it? Quite a long time!'

'Not real war. Too much threatening — by me I mean — and too little done. Well, that's finished. I am going to have my rights now or give you up for good. I'm tired of waiting. I am going to get Caesar to order Lucius to divorce you and to order you to marry me.'

'I thought you once told me there were risks? He seems to take action against the wrong persons. But I suppose there's no risk now, or you wouldn't be doing anything?'

'You have a poor opinion of me and it's not too late to change it. The risk is more than it was, much more. That is why I have waited so long. I'll tell you about Caesar. If you make a request to him he may refuse it just to spite you or to prove what a god can do. If I ask him and he is in a good temper, if he has had a big estate left to him or a city in Asia has started to worship him, or if he has had a night without a nightmare, he may give me what I want — both the divorce and you. And he may put an end to your husband into the bargain. If he is in a bad temper, if he has just been told that he cannot spend a million in rewarding the city in Asia for worshipping him as a god, or if he has had a bad night and has wandered through the corridors of the palace crying out that he is alone and deserted and that he cannot endure the darkness any longer, why then he may make an end of me and of your husband and take you for himself and tell you, when he lets you go, that you have been honoured by the love-making of a Jupiter or Mars. He does such things. He confers these privileges. He gets very angry if he is not thanked by the recipient. You must have heard the stories. Well, whatever the risks I'm going to take them now. If it ends ill, at least it is the end. Day

after day, night after night, for years you have tortured me. I have tortured myself because of you. Better an end than that it should go on.'

'It seems a queer way of showing that you love me.'

'It is not queer to me. Your father promised mine that you would marry me and you wrote to me that letter. It is useless to go over it all again, but unless you come to me, whether your husband divorces you or not — and I wouldn't insist now on a divorce if you preferred it the other way — I am going to get Caesar to give me what I want. And I warn you — I have the means.'

'You mean my letter — the letter that was stolen by Thyrsus and never reached Lucius, the letter that you used to threaten me with, the letter in which I spoke wildly about Caesar because he did not fight for his rights against Sejanus? Is that the letter? I was almost beside myself when I wrote it, fearing that I would not be able to marry Lucius?'

'And would have to marry me, you mean? How uncomplimentary, but as the successful suitor — in the end — I can afford to be forgiving. But you are wrong about the letter. I have it, but I do not intend to use it, because it would be fatal to my plans. If Caesar is capable of putting to death a man who told him he could not be Apollo because he was not handsome enough for the part, what would happen if he were told that the most charming woman in Rome had called him a coward and slave, a spindle-shanks with pimples on his face?'

'Caesar would not give the woman to you, that's what would happen.'

'Precisely, Metella, that's why I shall not tell him. But I do not want to threaten you. I would much rather that, late as you have left it, you agreed to do what I want and got Lucius to help.'

'No — whatever happens, no! I would rather that Caesar threw me to the beasts, and I would not come to you if Caesar and Lucius ordered it. You waste your time. Lucius and I have always stood together and we'll do it to the end.'

'An impressive declaration! But I'm afraid that in that case something will happen to separate him from you. I am afraid you are a little self-centred, my dear Metella. You think that if I am exerting my influence with Caesar it must be your most

unloyal letter about him that I shall use. But it might serve me better to let Caesar know what Lucius Paetus was writing about him at the time when he thought that Sejanus was going to force you to marry me and that Tiberius and the young Gaius were tamely yielding to his preposterous claims.'

'What did Lucius say? I'm sure he never said anything that was disrespectful to either of the Caesars.'

'I have the letter; it was written to you but it somehow came into my hands along with one or two others of the same kind. If I remember rightly, it said that Tiberius was in his dotage and that young Gaius had the mind of an infant. A bit rough on one of the major gods? He will not like it.'

'I don't believe that Lucius ever wrote such a letter,' declared Metella, 'nor that you have it. I believe you've invented it, you and Thyrsus. You would think nothing of doing that if you wanted evidence.'

'Thyrsus certainly is very unscrupulous,' said Aulus gravely. 'You are quite right to suspect him. But this, my dear Metella, is the genuine letter, and, if you search, you will find that it is missing from the collection of your husband's letters which no doubt you keep.' His level voice stopped and for a moment rose in bitterness. 'I hate the thought that he ever wrote you letters, and that you received them and kept them. It seems odd that I should mind about letters when you have belonged to him for years, but I do; I hate your having them. But that doesn't matter. This letter is the one in which your husband denounced your father Publius for consulting foreign soothsayers like Parmenio. You remember it, I'm sure. And now I must be going. You can let me know any time what your answer is. No, I won't accept any refusal now. Think it over once again.'

'Do you think I'm likely to change now, Aulus Cornelius, after all these years and the coming of my and Lucius's two children? Do you think that Lucius would consent or I accept his consent if he pretended to give it? Think again, yourself, Aulus Cornelius.'

'Still, you will think it worth while,' replied Aulus, 'to save your husband, for that is what it comes to. If you refuse, I go to Caesar. If he listens to me, your husband will be removed and there will be a message for you telling you how pleased Caesar will be when you marry me. He may send for you himself, and

that would be fatal, for no one could see you and not desire you. But I say again, since I can do nothing else, I take the risk.'

'You waste your time, Aulus Cornelius. I must go now.'

'I will give you till the end of the Saturnalia to decide — seven days from now. If you have not told me by then that you are coming to me, whether divorced or not, I shall use that letter and any other that will be useful to me. But I shall still try to be patient. I have been patient all these years, but I told you long ago that I would do everything to get my way. I mean it now.'

Tullus escorted Aulus to the street. His wife looked on malevolently from the shop, scowling at Aulus. She hoped, but in vain, that he would turn round and see what she was doing. She begged Metella to wait and rest a little. But Metella could not wait. She hastened home to examine the letters that she had received from Lucius. When she came to those that he had written to her in passionate protest at the time when Publius had determined to betroth her to Aulus she found that several were missing. She now vividly remembered the letter in which Lucius had ascribed dotage to Tiberius and an infantile mind to the prince Gaius. She knew that she had never destroyed it, but it had vanished. Thyrsus had been at work again.

On the last day of the Saturnalia, the popular festival in honour of the ancient god Saturnus, Lucius and Metella, taking Caecilia and also Iris with them, went in the late morning to visit Tullus and his family. They were to have cakes and wine together and then in the early afternoon they were all to return to the house on the Esquiline for the great meal of the day. The festival was a time of merriment and free manners. Slaves were allowed to wear the marks of freedmen and freedwomen, to put on the clothes of their owners, to sit at table and be waited on by them, and to talk with a licence which on any other day would have brought them harsh punishment. It had been agreed that Tullus and his family should come back to help in waiting on the household slaves. At Tullus's home in the Suburra they drank their wine and exchanged presents, as was the custom of the day: a jar of honey from Africa or Sicily, neat little writing tables, a gold hairpin, packets of wax tapers, a lantern, woollen slippers, soap, a copy of Virgil (for Tullus himself), an apron (for his wife), little figures of terra cotta, something for everyone. An hour or two

later, all in good spirits, they went out into the Suburra and began their walk to the Esquiline. They decided to go a long way round in order to enjoy the sights. The streets were packed with noisy, cheering crowds, blowing horns and trumpets, striking each other with bladders on the end of a string, shouting, singing and jostling. Many of the men were carrying children on their shoulders. A great part of the crowd consisted of slaves, who, during the Saturnalia were allowed to wear the cap of the freedman and, for once, behave as though they were really free. Many of them were drunk or thereabouts, some hilariously benevolent, some profoundly grave, some quarrelsome. But all minor offences were overlooked in these few days of licence.

Lucius and his party were making their way slowly through the press on the Palatine Hill, where the palaces of the Emperor and his family drew curious crowds. Presently, amid the uproar and joyous make-believe, they saw a familiar figure coming slowly towards them, surrounded by a dense mob which pressed upon him, propelling him onward, laughing and cheering. It was Thyrsus, more than half-drunk, who with dramatic gestures was, to the delight of his hearers, assailing everything and everybody who was of importance in Rome with magniloquent abuse. He excited great admiration when he announced that in his own country he had been a prince, that he had lost a throne through treachery, that Caesar had promised him redress, and that he would be glad to see them all at his Court when he was restored to power. This aroused enthusiastic merriment while Thyrsus indignantly protested that it was all sober truth. At frequent intervals he refreshed himself from a flagon of wine which a slave by his side handed up to him.

Then he saw Lucius, Metella and those with them. With furious looks he tried to open a way through the crowd towards them, pointing at them and bawling, 'Friends of Sejanus! Down with the enemies of Caesar! They have abused our noble Caesar. Down with the traitors! Down with them all! It's that man there' — (pointing at Lucius) 'and his wife' (pointing at Metella) — they're the worst of all. They insult Caesar. After them! After them!'

Thyrsus had, however, too well established his reputation as a jester with the crowd. When they looked and saw that Lucius

was a quiet well-behaved person and that Tullus and his family were very ordinary people they only laughed, but this time rather at than with Thyrsus. When he tried angrily to break through them in order to get at his victims they decided to have a little sport of their own with him. Rushing forward like a violent stream, they crowded upon him, and swept him along, though he fought desperately, until at last, at a turn in the road, he forced himself to the edge and was flung out into a side street, where he fell and lay prostrate. There, after a few minutes, his slave found him. A draught from the flagon helped him to recover. Stumbling to the entrance of the street he looked up and down as though he expected still to see, and would have pursued, Lucius and Metella. Seeing nothing of them he heartily cursed the Roman crowd, declaring that but for their stupidity he could have paid all his debts without himself running into any danger. It was a god-sent opportunity which he was sure would not come again. There were Lucius, Metella and Iris only a few yards away — he did not count Caecilia — an irresistible mob which could have swept over them and trampled them beyond recognition — and nothing had been done! He spat on the ground, shouted at the slave for not giving him more drink and slowly walked towards the house of Sextus Cornelius. On the way he stopped at a wine-shop to drink, met some of his intimates, treated them handsomely to drink as was his way, drank more himself, and presently went on. By the time that he arrived at Sextus's house he was morose, quarrelsome and vindictive.

The dinner for the slaves was just beginning. Sextus himself, Aelia Memmia and Aulus, together with freedmen attached to the family, were busily engaged in carrying in the food and waiting on the slaves. Sextus, though in himself a narrow, harsh man, had strong views about the duties of a Senatorial master on such an occasion as the Saturnalia. If it was the slaves' good time there should be no niggling about it. The food was excellent, as good as the family itself ever enjoyed; the slaves should have oysters, ham and duck and peacock; they should have Falernian to drink; and at the finish Spanish dancers to amuse them. There was great hilarity, especially when Sextus kissed the old slave who had nursed Aulus, and Aulus himself, after kissing the old woman, embraced her pretty daughter.

When all the slaves were busy eating, Sextus stood with his wife and son watching the scene.

'Well,' he said, 'they're enjoying themselves, I think. That's as it should be. You've done well for them, Aelia.'

'I'm glad it's only once a year anyway,' said his wife. 'It isn't as though they were grateful for it. They don't really feel grateful, I'm sure.'

'Does gratitude come into it?' asked Sextus, rather disapprovingly. 'We are bound to give them a good time to-day and we do. It hadn't occurred to me to wonder whether they have views about it. But for all I know they may have.'

'Slaves are unreasonable,' said Aulus, smiling at his father. 'Some of them won't believe that one day's feasting and shouting compensates them for being slaves all the rest of the year. What can you do with people like that!'

'You could take away the one day,' said his father, 'except that we ought not to neglect our ancient customs. By the way, Aulus, where is your freedman Thyrsus? I thought you told me he was coming?'

'He has come,' replied Aulus, who was facing the door of the room, while his father and mother had their backs to it. 'He has just come in and I should say that he is drunk and in a vile temper. He is so rather too often nowadays.'

Sextus and Aelia, turning, looked at Thyrsus, who gave them half a glance and then resumed the position he had taken up when he entered the room. He was standing not more than six feet from the nearest slaves, staring at them with the most malignant expression imaginable, his eyes travelling from one to another, and from one group to another, as though he hated every one of them.

'Aulus,' said his mother warningly, 'you had better speak to him. The slaves are noticing.'

'We don't want a scene,' agreed Sextus. 'He's your man, Aulus. Get him out unless he can behave.'

Aulus, approaching Thyrsus, said in a casual, friendly way—'We started without you. You've been amusing yourself elsewhere I should say. What's it like in the streets? Bacchus and Venus lording it as usual? You don't look much pleased with things. You may have missed Venus, but you certainly met Bacchus! What's the matter with you?'

Thysrus regarded him insolently and then stared again at the feasting slaves. 'Look at them!' he said. 'It makes me sick to see them eating, drinking, gorging, grinning. There they are, filling themselves as fast as they can and willing to put up with all the injuries, the insults, the cruelties that they undergo for the rest of the year.'

Aulus frowned. 'I shouldn't say much about that here.'

'Of course you wouldn't. You're one of the masters, aren't you?'

'It's not a very good time.'

'From your point of view no time is ever good. For the slaves any time is good. I wonder why they stand it. I often used to wonder why I stood it when I was a slave. They're as good as their masters anyway, and often better. I'd like to see their masters made to change places with them for good and all. I'll tell you what the trouble is, Aulus Cornelius. They've no arms, that's all.'

'You'd better stop talking like that, or you'll get into serious trouble. The slaves are listening.'

'Let them listen. It's time they listened to someone with views like mine. But you'll see: it will make no difference. They're very bold to-day and they even answer their masters back, but after the festival they will be as cringing as they ever were before.'

'I asked you,' said Aulus, 'what it was like in the streets, which will be a safer thing for you to talk about.' He spoke sharply. 'I suppose you got tired of the sight of slaves who won't assert themselves?'

Thysrus's voice rose in anger. 'I saw Lucius Paetus and his wife Metella and a lot of their relatives. They were all walking together on the Palatine Hill and had no escort. They could have been torn to pieces if the crowd had gone for them as I wanted it to do. But the crowd — most of it slaves, of course — would only laugh at me and think it a fine joke. So the whole family escaped. We could have destroyed every single one of them in the most unpleasant way — for them — and the crowd would have had to bear the blame. Nothing could have been done to me — or to you. Nothing could have been proved. And now we've got to deal with them separately. It's bad manage-

ment somewhere. How do we know whether we shall ever get another chance like that?’

‘We don’t know,’ said Aulus, ‘and probably we shan’t. And, besides, it was no chance at all because those people are not to be disposed of in that way. You leave the retaliation to me — that’s not your business. Now, are you going to lend a hand with feeding these slaves — ?’

‘No, I’m not.’ Thyrsus looked Aulus bluntly in the face. ‘Let them help themselves. I didn’t found the Saturnalia. I despise all slaves. I’m not going to help. They ought to wait on me, not I on them. If they were all like me, there would not be any slaves.’

‘You’ll oblige me,’ said Aulus, ‘by going into another room and waiting for me. As soon as the last of the wine has been poured out to them and the songs begin, I’ll come and join you. Then I’ll tell you what I’ve decided about going to Caesar. But you can’t stop here with everyone staring at you and some of them wondering why you’re not locked up. Be reasonable, man.’

He took Thyrsus by the arm and led him away. The freedman muttered angrily. Aulus made out that he was deriding the spiritlessness of a crowd which could have murdered Lucius and Metella and would not take its chance. Aulus left him for about half an hour, having given the slaves orders that he was on no account to have any more wine. When he returned he said, ‘I’ll tell you exactly what I’m going to do. I’ve given them’ — names were unnecessary — ‘until the end of the Saturnalia to decide, and unless they tell me by then that Lucius Paetus intends to divorce Metella at once, I’m going to Caesar in order to get him to order it. If I can’t do it in any other way, I’ll show him the letter.’

‘Which letter?’ said Thyrsus sullenly. ‘There are more than one.’

‘Lucius Paetus’s. That’s the only one that matters. The one you stole.’

‘I stole a good many for you, and it isn’t the only one that matters, don’t you think it. There’s the woman’s as well. That’s a good one. It beats her husband’s hollow. I tell you it lays about the Emperor in great style. Do you think he’d like to read it? I think he would, you know.’

'That's not your business. I'm only talking of the letter of Lucius Paetus. That's all we're concerned with.'

'Is it?' Thyrsus was defiant. 'I don't take that view. I think you should show the other one, his wife's about Caesar. It's much the worse of the two, and, after all, it's great Caesar's safety we have to think of. Isn't it so, Aulus Cornelius? Or you might like me to send it to Caesar. It would be a pleasure.'

Aelia Memmia and Sextus had come in and had been listening. Thyrsus took no notice of them.

'Why don't you tell him, Aulus,' said Aelia, 'that as you are, going to marry Metella yourself there's no question of doing anything that might harm her? He's insubordinate.'

Thyrsus regarded her with insolent amusement.

'He knows, mother,' said Aulus patiently, 'but he doesn't agree.'

'Tell him to agree,' said Sextus, 'and that the quicker he agrees the better for him. Don't argue with the fellow. He needs discipline. But you'd better settle with him yourself.'

Sextus gave a nod to his wife and they went out together.

'Listen!' said Aulus. 'Understand that there is no question of taking any steps whatever that may hurt Metella. You've known it for years, so we need not argue about it. I would never have let you avenge yourself on her any time these last eight years. And I won't now. She's going to marry me and if her husband has to suffer it is because he stands in the way. That's all. Everything's settled.'

Thyrsus was as determined as he was sullen. 'You made me steal that letter from the woman,' he said. 'I never delivered it, but I read it. Then you wrote, after you went to Cyprus, warning her about the things she had said against Caesar and what might happen to her if she said such things again. I read that letter, too. And now you say you're going to do nothing. But it wasn't Lucius Paetus who ordered me — me! — me! — to be flogged. It was the woman.'

'I know. Very unpleasant, but you brought it on yourself. You should have let the slave girl alone or managed it better. You were clumsy about it. But that's over and done with now.'

'Is it? That's news to me. You have her letter and it can be used. Well, then?'

Aulus tried to be patient. 'I've told you often that nothing can be done against Metella. I wanted that letter of hers because I thought that I might frighten her with it, but she's not easily frightened. She can't be frightened except through her husband, so we shall have to try that.'

'Do you mean,' said Thyrsus, 'that I shall never be able to pay her back for what she did to me?'

'You certainly will not, if she marries me, as I intend she shall do. Put that idea out of your head and make a good job of it. You had better concentrate on getting even with the actual villain Pericles. He's got powerful protection nowadays, you know — no less than uncle Claudius.'

'He was a slave,' said Thyrsus, 'and he obeyed orders, as he always would. Claudius or no Claudius, he won't escape me. He's a simpleton as well as a canting humbug. In any case he'd better look out, since his patron Claudius isn't any too secure himself. The Emperor doesn't like uncle Claudius; that I know, and he'd soon dispose of him if it weren't so useful to have a butt that the people can easily make fun of. But it's the woman I'm concerned with, Aulus Cornelius.' He got up and paced the room, his face distorted with hatred. 'She ordered me, a freedman and once a prince, to be flogged in front of the household and the slaves. But she has had the misfortune to write a letter deriding the Emperor. We have that letter now because I stole it for you and we can act on it. I want my revenge — that's all I care about — but you, Aulus Cornelius, have a duty towards Caesar. You have to show him this letter whatever the result, otherwise you may find that someone who knows you have suppressed it thinks it his duty to inform Caesar of what has *not* been reported to him.'

'You threaten me,' said Aulus. 'If I do not show the letter to Caesar, you will show it to him yourself?'

'Or get it shown. I am not particular. I want justice, and I don't care how I get it.'

Aulus looked at the freedman for a minute or two in silence. Thyrsus, who was no longer quite so drunk, regarded him with an offensive, patronizing smile. 'You've had time, Aulus Cornelius,' he said, 'to do what you wanted with the woman and you didn't take your chance. Now I have a chance and I don't

intend to lose it. But I am not unreasonable; I am willing to meet you half-way. Show both the letters to Caesar at the same time and see what happens. That's a fair offer.'

'See here,' said Aulus. 'I think that you are not too drunk to understand. You have, maybe, a just grievance against Metella, but if she marries me you will have to drop it. You can surely see that for yourself. But if I get rid of her husband and she still refuses me, then I shall act against her, too. I will get my way or I will use the letter even if I destroy her. Does that content you?'

'No!' Thyrsus became more truculent as he thought he saw Aulus giving ground. 'What good is that to me? She'll marry you and live happily in your house with her children by Lucius Paetus and by you. Nice for you but no use for me! I want my way as much as you want yours, and I know how to get it.'

'You do it at your peril.'

'I think not. Those who expose the Emperor's enemies receive his thanks.'

Aulus stood up. He walked the room several times, looking now and then at Thyrsus. At last he stopped in front of him and said abruptly, 'We'd better settle it, then. Did you ever know a man called Sophron?'

Thyrsus's hands stiffened on the sides of the chair in which he was sitting. His eyes searched Aulus's face; in his own there were questioning, fear and anger. When he saw that Aulus was watching him he controlled himself and in a few moments, relaxing, he said, 'Sophron? No, who is Sophron? A friend of yours?'

'I'll tell you a story,' said Aulus. 'Have you ever been in Miletus?'

This time Thyrsus was ready for him, and without change of expression he said, 'I touched there once on board a ship, but we did not go ashore.' After a second's pause he added smoothly, 'Is Sophron at Miletus?'

Aulus said — 'He was. A good many years ago there was a rich Roman merchant at Miletus, a Knight, who lived there for part of each year with his wife. He had many slaves, among them Sophron. One night the merchant and his wife were murdered. Sophron was found unconscious, nearly dead. It was thought that he could not recover but he did. He described how his

master had been attacked by three slaves who had always given trouble, how his mistress, who had started to scream, had been killed, and how he himself was bludgeoned when he tried to interfere. Money and jewels disappeared with the slaves. They got a good start but two of them were captured. Sophron identified them and they were crucified. We take a serious view, you know, of slaves who murder Roman masters. The third slave, although Sophron gave a precise description of him, disappeared. He was never found. As there was a hue and cry for him throughout Asia it was generally thought that he had died through some accident or taken his own life or been killed in a brawl; he was a violent man and, besides, he had some of the loot with him. No one dreamed that he had in fact been sold again as a slave and would turn up years afterwards as the slave of the Senator Publius Antonius and now the freedman of another Senator's son, Aulus Cornelius.'

There was a silence. Thyrsus was intently watchful. 'I am still puzzled, Aulus Cornelius. What has this Sophron to do with me?'

'He was in Cyprus when I was there — he was a slave to the Governor — and he recognized you as you left my house. I had done him some kindness, so he told me instead of carrying his story to the Governor. I paid him to hold his tongue and he did until he died.'

At the last words the slightest quiver passed through Thyrsus, some new idea gleamed for a second in his eyes, then he was completely quiet again. 'Now that I come to think of it,' he said, 'I believe I came across the man in Cyprus, though never before then. But surely I saw him alive on my last visit to the island?'

'No, he died before that — soon after he told me he had recognized you.'

Thyrsus nodded. 'I see, but it makes no difference. I never knew the man before I visited Cyprus. I never knew or saw the Roman merchant and his wife, so I didn't murder them. And this witness of yours, if that's what you would call him, is dead.'

'Not quite so fast,' said Aulus. 'After I heard Sophron's story I took the precaution of inquiring in Miletus. My friends looked up the official records. The results were interesting. The missing murderer was a slave called Antistes, who was described in the

proclamation as a thick-set man with a large, white face, the left arm longer than the right, and a deep scar across the right wrist where a chain had cut deep into it. I don't know about your arms but — ' Aulus pointed to the right wrist of Thyrsus where a scar was plainly visible. Thyrsus made no attempt to hide it.

Aulus was walking up and down again. 'What do you think of my story?' he asked.

'Oh, most interesting, Aulus Cornelius, but, you see, it has nothing to do with me. Sophron mistook me for someone else.'

'And the report from Miletus?'

'That too must refer to someone else, not me.'

Aulus spoke in a matter-of-fact, almost casual, voice. 'In that case, you had better go to Miletus to see if they identify you there. I think they would. That scar and one arm's being shorter than the other. Would you like them measured? There's no doubt what would happen to you. But, of course, it's for you to say.'

The two men looked at one another, then Thyrsus sat with his eyes turned to the ground and his hands tightly clasped. Looking up, he addressed Aulus with deliberation. 'If you denounce me, they will send me to Miletus however much I protest my innocence, and then this report will be produced against me.' He spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders. 'My position would be difficult. I submit to your terms, Aulus Cornelius, but you will allow me to hope that you yourself will some day settle my debt for me.'

'Good!' said Aulus, 'I thought you would be sensible. You know the prejudice against an ex-slave accused of murdering his master. But tell me this since we now understand each other: When you fled from Miletus you were a free man and then you turned up again in Rome as a slave. How did that come about?'

'I fled as quickly as I could to Alexandria. When the old man was killed we split up so as to lessen the chance of discovery. We had not intended to kill his wife, but it was her own fault; the old fool began to screech. Sophron should have been killed at once and I thought he had been but one of the others bungled that. It was stupid not to make sure. I made for the harbour. I knew that there was a ship just about to leave, and I had already arranged to go on her. I just managed to get on board in time and we were off to Alexandria. I was lucky in that, but I was

unlucky in getting mixed up in trouble at Alexandria. I took a hand in looting some Jewish shops which had been set up just outside the entrance to their quarter. The Jews had only themselves to blame. They should stop inside their own place. But the Romans sent soldiers and unfortunately one of them was killed. That was a good thing, too, but the Romans didn't think so. They said they had to make an example. They executed six ringleaders and they took about a score of the rioters, whether they were free men or freed slaves or just slaves, and sold them publicly at auction. I was one of those. They asked no questions but just sold me. That's how I came to Rome.'

'And the money and the jewels? Some of them were recovered with the other two slaves, I was told.'

'I entrusted them to friends, though I have never been able to find the friends.' Thyrsus laughed unpleasantly. 'But I am still looking for them!'

'And the story about your being a Syrian prince. That's true, I hope?'

'Perfectly true, and I hope that some day, with your kind support, I shall be able to persuade Caesar to restore me to my kingdom.'

'You deserve a kingdom,' said Aulus, 'if only because you are magnificent at lying. The records at Miletus prove that you were a slave from birth — the child of a Syrian slave-girl in your master's household, father unknown.'

The blood rushed into Thyrsus's face and ebbed away again. He looked sullenly at Aulus, then took a threatening step towards him.

'All right; all right,' said Aulus, 'I thought you'd better see that I know everything. Don't get angry again. Let us be agreed. Do as I desire and you will hear no more of this. Do as you have threatened and off you go to Miletus for examination. I'm afraid that your word would be nothing against mine.'

'Right!' replied Thyrsus, suddenly all smiles. 'I have no alternative, Aulus Cornelius. The only thing I could plead would be that you tried to protect an enemy of Caesar — no offence, I assure you! — and they would refuse to believe me while they were hurrying me off, probably in chains, to Miletus. I got the scar from chains, by the way. That Roman Knight was a brute.'

He maltreated abominably the slaves he disliked. He chained me up once and had me flogged. I nearly escaped. In trying to get out of my chains I tore my right wrist deeply — that's how I got the scar. And, if you want to know, Aulus Cornelius' — he spat out the words — 'I hated him, I hate him still — I'm glad I cut his throat, and his silly wife's, and I wish that I'd cut Sophron's.'

Aulus made a contemptuous grimace. 'That will do,' he said. 'Forget it. You're not called on to cut throats now.'

'Oh no, no,' said Thyrsus, 'I should think not indeed. And I'm most grateful to you, Aulus Cornelius, for your confidence. You shall have no cause to forget it. You will let me know if I can be of any further use to you in this matter?' He went off with a smile to Aulus, who, looking after him, muttered — 'I've a good mind to get rid of him, anyhow. But then I don't know how Caesar might take his accusations against me if he made them. Curse him and Caesar, too! I'll handle Lucius and Metella first and then I'll finish off our Thyrsus.'

CHAPTER VI

NEVERTHELESS, for a month longer Aulus waited. He was tormented by his desire at last to get Metella away from Lucius Paetus, but he dreaded, when he must now put all to the test, lest, in getting rid of Lucius, he should lose Metella finally, and even see her handed over to some other man. Sometimes he even wondered whether, since he had suffered her partnership with Lucius so long, it would not be better to reconcile himself to its indefinite continuance. He had borne it day by day and night by night; why not, then, ask Caesar for some command on the frontier and go out to forget? But the idea only passed through his mind to be rejected. He would not, after all this waiting, talking, threatening, tamely give up the object which he had desired during all his grown-up life. It was this or nothing. He knew his Caesar — capricious, illogical, inconsequent, perhaps mad — but he would not go on as he had gone on for over nine years. It would soon be as long as the time that Greeks and

Trojans had fought over Helen of Troy. That should content any woman. That was as much as any woman was worth, even Metella. It was enough, it was too much. His mind was made up. He would settle it.

His mother, Aelia Memmia, encouraged him. She had never been able to understand why he had been so easy-going, so patient. She thought little of a woman who, in any circumstances, had preferred someone else to her son and she was puzzled that he still desired to marry her, but if he did, that was enough for her, and Metella's offence in choosing Lucius was an additional reason why she should be subdued. Aelia Memmia promised herself that there were a few things that she would teach the independent, unruly Metella if fortune should yet bring her under the Cornelian roof. She was convinced that if Aulus now went ahead, abandoning his strange hesitations, there could be no serious obstacles. Tiberius, through the Sejanus affair, had intervened to thwart him once, but that had been a marvel of unlucky chance. Such things did not happen twice. 'Go to Caesar,' she said to her son. 'Lose no time. You say yourself that there's no telling what's going to happen nowadays. He likes you, doesn't he? Then make use of it.'

Sextus Cornelius was faintly contemptuous of his son. When they came back to Rome he had supported Aulus by calling on Publius Antonius to fulfil his promise, but he himself had thought that the whole business was mistaken and that Aulus, especially if he were as much in favour with Caesar as he said, could make a much better marriage. But if people would not take his advice they must suffer for their folly. 'Only take care,' he said to his son, 'that you don't overreach yourself. You know I don't think much of Caesar. I disapprove of him. Tiberius was a tyrant, but he had a sense of duty, he was dignified, and he didn't have hallucinations about being a god. This man is impossible.'

'I wish, father,' his son replied, 'that you would yourself take care. I know there is a good deal in what you say, but Caesar has for years treated me as a friend, whereas he has complained of you to me, as I told you at the time.'

'The greater the friend, the worse the danger,' said Sextus bitterly. 'Unless, of course, one is an enemy. But I'm neither the one nor the other. In striking at me he couldn't look for the

pleasure that he gets from destroying a friend or even the thrill that it gives him to torment an enemy. He ignores me, my dear Aulus. I've held high offices; I was important enough to be banished by Tiberius; I have been chosen by the Senate for the most honourable missions. But in Caesar's eyes I do not count, I am not there, I do not exist, and therefore I am reasonably safe, while you, who do count and are there in the Palace, are not safe at all. You should invite Caesar to provide you with a wife, well-born, rich and clever, in order to assist you to a great career, but not good-looking, lest he hands you soiled goods at the finish.'

Aulus, touched at his most sensitive spot, almost snarled with irritation. His father, saying, 'Oh, I know you won't listen. Well, go your own way and I wish you well,' left him.

What surprised Aulus and at first made him suspicious, but then began to please him, was the changed attitude of Thyrsus. The man was agreeable, polite, sympathetic. He appeared to have completely accepted his patron's decision to get rid of Lucius Paetus as a first step. He did not think, he told Aulus, that there could be much difficulty about this; he was sure that Aulus would have influence enough with Caesar. He only wondered whether Aulus should not try somehow to prepare the ground a little better for the acquisition of Metella. He suggested that Caesar might suddenly say — 'But why should you want to marry the wife of my enemy?' or 'I'll find you a much finer wife, my dear fellow, someone connected with my own family, and your Metella can be given as a reward to one of my Praetorians or a gladiator or one of my favourite actors.' 'Go to Caesar at once,' urged Thyrsus, 'if you feel that you can rely on your scheme going through entire, but, if not, I should respectfully urge you still to wait a little. It would be beyond bearing, Aulus Cornelius, I am sure, if, after having had to think of Metella as the wife of Lucius Paetus all this time, you now had to see her become the wife of some low, brutal fellow. I still urge caution.'

Aulus cursed Thyrsus secretly, but the warnings went deep; they were the voice of his own fear. He wished that he had denounced the man long ago and that he had gone to Caesar and risked the worst so that all would have been by this time settled. He passed from one indecision to another until January 19th

came. He was sitting in his room thinking for the thousandth time of the words used in the stolen letters about the Emperor by Lucius and by Metella. He had thought about them so often and so long that his mind sometimes became confused, and on this morning he suddenly decided to get them out, examine them once again and possibly decide to take that of Lucius Paetus and go to Caesar without more delay. He went to the chest in which he kept his private papers, opened it and took out Lucius's letter. He read once more the description of Tiberius Caesar as in his 'dotage' and of Gaius Caesar as 'infantile'. He smiled, and be-thought himself that he must have some good story ready to explain why it was only now that he was exposing this piece of treason against Caesar. Well, that needed little ingenuity; the cunning Thyrsus would be ready with a plausible explanation. Next he would look at Metella's letter. He almost feared to look at it again; there was material in it to destroy her a hundred times over, but of what use was that to him since she would not yield to threats, and his fear now was lest she should be destroyed, or destroyed so far as his possession of her was concerned. He turned the papers over mechanically, lost in his thoughts. He turned them again, and then, suddenly realizing that he was not finding what he sought, began to hunt vigorously. The letter was not there. He searched minutely but in vain. He felt no doubt about what had happened. He had at once a complete certainty. He remembered that two days earlier, when he returned to the house, the steward had handed him a letter from Thyrsus. It was about something quite unimportant; he had thought nothing of it. He summoned the steward and questioned him. Yes, the note had been written by Thyrsus himself in the house. Thyrsus had asked whether his patron had not left a certain book for him; he had asked the steward to search in Aulus's room and had followed him to help; when the book could not be found he had said that he would write and leave a note for Aulus so that the steward need not trouble to report the matter to his master; and the steward had left him alone in the room for several minutes.

So Thyrsus had the letter and had had it for two days. He had no means of direct access to Caesar, but he might find indirect ways of getting the letter into the hands of Caesar's staff, and he

would lose no time. Aulus hesitated no longer. He would go to Caesar the next day. He would win his promise both about Lucius Paetus and, if circumstances favoured him, about Metella. After that he would wring from Thyrsus the return of the letter or, at least, its whereabouts and he would arrange to have him seized immediately afterwards as an escaped murderer.

Early on the next day, January 20th, Aulus went to the Palace. He did not join the first throng of Senators and other important persons who were received together by the Emperor. He went to an ante-room where several of Caesar's secretaries were at work. They were all freedmen, for the most part clever Greeks. He asked one of them to arrange an audience for him as soon as the general reception was over. As a rule Caesar's intimates had not long to wait unless the other visitors to be received individually were of great importance. Aulus was anxious and preoccupied. He scarcely noticed that the secretary to whom he spoke, and whom he knew quite well, started with surprise and looked first at him and then at his fellow-officials in plain embarrassment. Presently, however, he saw that they were all of them behaving oddly, whispering to one another, staring at him, even moving away as though they desired to avoid him. 'It's rather urgent,' he said a little curtly to the secretary, who continued to stand still as though he feared to move at all. 'Yes, of course,' said the man, suddenly coming to life and rubbing his chin with his hand as though in painful perplexity, 'of course, Aulus Cornelius, I know it is most urgent. I fully understand. Naturally you want to see Caesar at once, before it is too late, I mean. Fortunately he has no one with him now. He is dictating dispatches and I'm afraid it is not quite the best moment to approach him. He was very angry just now, but perhaps when he has finished that particular subject, he'll be calm again.' He smiled nervously at Aulus. 'It might even be a good thing to wait a little, do you think?' Just a little I mean—I know that you must not wait long.' He was plaintive and still did not move.

'What ails the man?' Aulus thought. 'He's queer. Of course he's frightened of Caesar. They all are, never knowing what may not happen to them. And what's all this about urgency and the danger of its being too late and his knowing that I must not wait long? It's true enough, but what do these fellows know about it?'

He could think of only one explanation — that Thyrsus had managed to get his complaint against Metella brought to the Emperor's notice and that the Emperor was taking the worst view of it. Well, he must know. He must put an end to this new and horrible uncertainty. He must find out what it was that these secretaries knew and feared to tell him, what it was that made some of them who had been well-known to him for years try to avoid his eyes this morning.

'My business will not wait,' he said to the secretary. 'Would you try to arrange that I see Caesar as soon as ever possible. I must. Lives depend on it.'

The secretary nodded gravely. 'I know what you mean,' he said. 'I will do what I can, Aulus Cornelius,' and went out of the room.

'He knows,' muttered Aulus. 'They all know. Caesar knows. I have already lost Metella.' He clenched his hands tight, standing stockstill in the centre of the room, while the others took secret glances at him.

The secretary returned. He beckoned Aulus to follow him. As they left the room he whispered. 'Be careful, Aulus Cornelius; say nothing to provoke him this morning. He's in one of his tempers. Agree with everything he says, though that too may annoy him.'

As they entered the large room where the Emperor was working the secretary announced 'Aulus Cornelius,' and hastily withdrew. Gaius was sitting in a chair on a slightly raised platform; this was, in fact, his private tribunal at which he heard State cases. He was frowning and tapping the arms of his chair while he talked to a secretary who was sitting at a table nearby taking notes. His voice was loud and threatening. He took no notice of Aulus's entrance, not even glancing at him. He said suddenly to the secretary, 'Read out the notes of my instructions about Petronius'.

The secretary read from his notes —

'Caesar does not understand why Petronius has not, long ago, carried out his orders to erect Caesar's statue in the Temple at Jerusalem nor why he has yielded to the intolerable threats of the rebellious Jews. Petronius is to understand that he

showed disrespect to Caesar in asking for a postponement of the orders, which must now be immediately fulfilled. Caesar cannot think, however, that this sacred task can be entrusted to one who has shown himself as disloyal as he is incompetent, and Petronius is therefore informed —

The secretary stopped and waited. Still not looking at Aulus the Emperor said harshly, 'You have come here this morning to ask a favour of me, Aulus Cornelius?'

Before Aulus could answer the Emperor said, 'Pontius Pilate was entirely right. They are rebellious scum and Lucius Vitellius is a fool.' At last he looked at Aulus.

'Yes, Caesar,' said Aulus, 'and I am sure that you who have granted me so many favours will not think me presumptuous in making my petition to-day.'

Gaius twisted abruptly in his chair, turned his head, stared straight at Aulus, and broke into derisive laughter as though he were getting intense enjoyment from a joke.

'Oh, you're sure, are you? You know already, before you state your petition, that I shall grant it? How well you understand me! Nothing is hid from you.' He sniggered, looking knowingly at the secretary, who sniggered, too. Then —

'Aulus Cornelius,' he said, 'give me your frank opinion. I am sending orders to Petronius, the Governor of Syria, who has entirely failed to carry out orders to set up my statue in the Temple at Jerusalem, the most sacred possession of the Jews, the centre of their religion, and therefore the place where my statue, and none other, should be set up for their worship. Do you agree?'

'Yes, Caesar, I do.'

'You are not enthusiastic, Aulus Cornelius.' Then he spoke savagely — 'What punishment, in your opinion, does such disrespect, I will say such sacrilege, demand?'

'There is no penalty, Caesar,' said Aulus firmly, 'that is too great, not even death, for anyone who has shown you disrespect or failed you even in the smallest things.'

'I will remind you of that presently,' said the Emperor. '“No penalty too great . . . for anyone who has failed me . . . even in the smallest things.” It is beautifully said, Aulus Cornelius.'

“Even in the smallest things.” Yes, I will remind you of it presently when you ask your favour of me.’ He gave Aulus a long, deliberate smile, then shouted at the secretary, ‘Tell Petronius that after his failure to establish the statue of the Emperor and god Gaius in the Temple of Jerusalem in order that the Jews might worship it instead of their preposterous god, he is to hand over the task forthwith to his successor and to take his own life. Make all arrangements for his deputy to report to me promptly that my orders have been carried out and that Petronius is dead.’

The Emperor’s face relaxed; it expressed his satisfaction at a good piece of State-duty well accomplished. In an agreeable voice he said to Aulus — ‘But I have been forgetting your petition, Aulus Cornelius. What is it? I cannot imagine, but first I have one or two questions for you. What was it you said just now about “even in the smallest things”? No penalty too great, did you say? What do you think ought to be done to any man who refuses to come to the Palace here and pay me his due respects?’ Before he could receive any answer Gaius turned again to the secretary — ‘What was that other subject I was to write about? Why do you sit there gaping and smiling like a ninny? Are you laughing at me? Why haven’t you gone away to write that dispatch to Petronius? Do you want to delay it until he dies a natural death instead of dying in the way I want him to? I’d like to give him the slowest death imaginable and see him die it. Get out!’ The Emperor roared at him again. ‘Get out!’ and, as the scared secretary made for the door, ‘and send in someone who is not a natural fool.’

The Emperor slumped in his chair, with his head sunk on his chest, staring at Aulus with sharp malignity. ‘Well, Aulus Cornelius,’ he said, ‘are you dumb? Have you lost your tongue? Be thankful you’re not like the man whose tongue I had cut out because he dared to reproach me at the Circus when he was about to be thrown to the beasts. Why don’t you speak, man?’ Then, as he saw the new secretary hurrying to his table he turned on him — ‘Why didn’t you come before? The question of Petronius was finished, wasn’t it? You didn’t know? You never know, none of you knows a thing; it would do you good to have a taste of the rod — or better still the cross — all round, and you shall have

it some day. What do you want now? Oh, the occasion of my appearing as a god at Alexandria! Of course!’ He rose from his chair, and wrapping his cloak about him, paced the room, complacent and proud. He stopped to pat Aulus on the shoulder. ‘Cheer up, my good Aulus. Remember that you have a god for master and even for your companion. That will console you, will it not, even if I should have to reject your petition? Will it not, Aulus Cornelius?’ He stopped, suddenly threatening, before Aulus.

‘Yes, Caesar,’ was the reply.

‘I thought it would,’ said the Emperor, ironically. ‘It is just as well. Now’ — to the secretary — ‘take this down.’ He then described to the secretary the ceremony which he planned at Alexandria. In this he proposed to appear as the god Gaius. He gave minute instructions about the day and time, the retinue which he would bring with him, the potentates and personages who were to be invited from far and near, the public rejoicings that were to be instituted, the gifts that he would distribute, and all the manifold signs by which he was to be made manifest as the brother and equal colleague of the Greek and Roman gods. By the end of the dictation he was affable again. ‘Look at him!’ he said to the secretary, pointing at Aulus. ‘How gloomy he is when he hears that his master and friend is one of the great gods.’ He reseated himself and beckoned Aulus to sit down.

‘Now about this petition,’ he said. ‘I had been minded to be angry with you, Aulus, but I should be above anger with mere mortal men.’ Then he shot at him — What is your answer to my question?’

‘That it is indeed wrong that anyone should not come here to pay his due respects to Caesar, but sometimes there may be reasons —’

Aulus broke off unhappily. He suspected too well that the Emperor was referring to his father and he could not be certain that any imaginable defence would not infuriate him.

The Emperor was laughing quietly again. ‘Reasons, my good Aulus, for insulting Caesar! That was not what you said just now, was it? Let me see, “no penalty too severe even in the smallest things?” And what if that same man has been heard deriding Caesar to his intimates and even mere acquaintances?’

Remember that I executed one man for daring to criticize some show that I gave and that I burned an author alive because he wrote a line with a double meaning. And what,' said Gaius, suddenly springing to his feet, 'what if the same man, when pretending to congratulate Caesar on his coming to power four years ago, openly insulted him?'

'At least, Caesar, he would not, he could not, do that intentionally. He had every reason to be grateful to the master who brought him back from exile.'

'He had, but he was not grateful. He attacked me, he insulted me.' Gaius clapped his hands, and when the secretary entered, 'Bring me,' he said, 'the case of Sextus Cornelius'. When the man returned with some documents, Gaius, now self-satisfied again, took them and said — 'Your father, Sextus Cornelius, sent me what pretended to be a congratulatory address. And do you know what he did? He quoted to me, and at me, Horace's prayer to the gods that they would make our youth teachable and virtuous. What do you say to that?' He overbore Aulus's stammered explanations. 'Don't dare to say it was not aimed at me. Is that what you meant? Well, just as well you didn't! How old was I then? Not much more than twenty-four; was I not a young man? Was not your father telling the gods that I, who am no lower than they, needed to be made teachable and virtuous? Can you think of any worse thing he could have said about me? I took note of it at the time and never forgot it. And yet you think fit to come here to-day and ask me, who have been so insulted, to revoke my order for his death.'

'My father!' said Aulus, horror-struck and starting back, while Gaius, thrusting his head forward and broadly grinning, followed him step by step. 'My father condemned to death! But I did not know. I had no idea. I have not seen him since yesterday afternoon — and there was nothing then.'

'Be grateful,' said the Emperor, 'for my consideration. Some days ago there was a young man who for his crimes against me had to be executed and I ordered his father to look on at the death. I might have done the same with you, Aulus Cornelius, did I not like you so much. But you had better go, if you wish to see him alive. I am considerate.' He spoke to the secretary. 'How much time did I give Sextus Cornelius?'

'Twenty-four hours from midnight,' said the man.

'Ah!' said the Emperor. 'You see, Aulus Cornelius, you have plenty of time. You need not hurry after all, especially as this seems to be something of a surprise to you.' He was almost affectionate. Then a puzzled look came over him. 'But, Aulus Cornelius,' he said, 'I don't understand. You said just now that you did not know that I had had to punish your father for his crime. But I thought you came to beg a pardon for him.'

'No, Caesar,' said Aulus, 'I knew nothing. I came to ask you to order an enemy of yours — as I can prove him to be — to divorce his wife in order that I might marry her. She was pledged to me long ago and I was deprived of her by fraud.'

'Why, my dear Aulus,' replied Gaius, 'of course. That is a little thing to do for you, especially as you are taking the death of your father with the respect to me that I expected of you. But we won't go into your petition now. I am very busy with this question of manifesting myself as god at Alexandria — that comes before everything, you will agree — and you want naturally to see your father. Come back in a few days and I shall arrange everything to please you. Who is the man, and who the favoured woman?'

'Lucius Paetus, an official in the Syrian Department, and Metella, daughter of the late Senator, Publius Antonius.'

'Lucius Paetus? And you say you can show he's an enemy to Caesar? Poor Lucius! And Metella — but I think I have met her. A charming girl if I remember rightly. You must present her to me, good Aulus, when we've dealt with Lucius Paetus. This poor Lucius!' He roared with laughter. 'Now good-bye for the present, my dear Aulus. You may rely on me. In a few days' time, remember, and don't look so gloomy on a day when your Caesar dispenses equally justice and kindness.'

As Aulus went out the secretary who had taken him to the Emperor touched his arm. 'I am sorry, Aulus Cornelius,' he whispered miserably. 'But no one can do anything. No one knows what is going to happen next. It is terrible. But no one can do anything.'

Aulus nodded mechanically. 'No,' he said, 'I suppose not. No one can do anything.' He told the secretary that he would be returning to the Palace on the twenty-fifth day of the month;

would the secretary kindly arrange an audience for him. Then he hurried out, seeking his father while there was time.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the December day on which Aulus had spoken to her, Metella knew that the time of battle had come. Caecilia tried to persuade her that it was only another threat; a man who had so often talked and done nothing, she said, would do nothing now. Metella felt that it was untrue. The sight of Thyrsus at the Saturnalia urging the mob against them confirmed her fears; he would never, she declared, have ventured to threaten them with public violence unless he had known that his patron was about to take action. She was filled with fear that her husband might be destroyed; that she would be handed over to Aulus or to someone just as horrible; that she might be deprived of her children. She lost her confidence. She brooded over ways sometimes of intimidating, sometimes of placating Aulus. She told Caecilia that she would go and see him alone, and when Caecilia, failing by protesting to make any impression on her, came out with the truth to Lucius and he was angry, Metella told him that someone had to do something and if nothing was done some fine night they would find a file of soldiers in the house with orders to take them away, and that she was resolved to act, she did not know how, if Lucius could suggest nothing better. Afterwards she wept in his arms, declaring that she knew he would be taken from her and that anything was better than sitting tamely waiting to be struck down. Lucius still counselled patience, trying to comfort her by saying that he would think of some way out, but the same thought was in the minds of both, that there was no way out now if the Emperor and Aulus both continued to live. Lucius became grave and preoccupied. One day Caecilia told him that she was sure Metella meant to visit Aulus and might even yield to him if she was convinced that thereby Lucius would be saved from danger. From that time onward Lucius watched Metella closely and, though she did not know it, he charged two of his slaves to follow her wherever she went and to report to him instantly if

she seemed to be going far afield or to be meeting Aulus or any of his family. He frequently went to consult with Lucius Vitellius and Lollia Claudia, but not even they had anything useful to suggest. He tried to get Pericles back for a short time, but Claudius had now become so pleased with his learned freedman that he could not part with him, reproaching him with selfishness if he asked for even the shortest leave of absence. Besides, as Pericles himself pointed out to Lucius, he probably was much more useful as a freedman of Claudius, since he could enter the various palaces of the Caesars on behalf of his master; he had now many friends among the other freedmen and he could, without being suspected, hear and report what went on.

One evening, on the twentieth day of the year, the day on which Aulus had gone to the Emperor, Lucius had gone out saying that he must again discuss with Vitellius what should be done with the two children if he and Metella should be seized at the same time. Tullus's wife, Norba, arrived to see Metella. She must make haste, she said, for she feared lest her husband should discover where she had gone, and what she had said, in which event he would be so angry that he might do anything. She had, for some days, wanted to tell Metella what she knew. On several nights during the last half-month and on this very night, Lucius had come to their house. Her husband had been ready for him, had taken him to a room upstairs, and there had come also, about the same time, three or four other men whom she had not seen, and whose names she did not know. Before Lucius and the others had arrived for the first time her husband had warned her to ask no questions and to keep out of the way. This she had done at first, but later had questioned him, whereupon he had broken out angrily at her and had warned her that her curiosity might destroy not only herself and her family but a good many other families too, including Metella's. Nevertheless, she had tried her best on one or two nights to discover who the visitors were when they were leaving, but in this, too, she had failed. They were so wrapped up in their cloaks she could make nothing of them. She had determined that she must tell Metella what was happening, though she earnestly begged her never to reveal how she had got her information. Metella promised. When her husband returned Metella, doing her best to appear unconcerned,

said cheerfully, 'Well, and since when has the great Vitellius been meeting you at the pastrycook's, may I ask?' Lucius was turning away from her at the moment, but he stopped suddenly and, when he turned round, she saw that his face was white and startled. Before he could say anything she went on hastily — 'I'm sorry, Lucius, I didn't mean to startle you. I know Vitellius wasn't there. I was sure you weren't going to see him. You couldn't have been going to see him at this time. It's because I'm afraid for you, Lucius; I can't bear your going out alone at night; I don't know what's going to happen to you if I'm not there — I followed you all the way until you reached your cousin's house. I saw you go in and then — after a while — I came back here.' He kept his eyes fixed on her as though he had the sharpest suspicions, but he said nothing to question her story. So she went on and said — 'But you must tell me what you went for, Lucius. You can't leave me in ignorance now that things are as they are. It's no use telling me that you went to talk to your cousin. You don't love his company as much as that — I mean I don't suppose that this is the first time, is it? Tell me what it is all about then and who they were. You must tell me, you know. It wouldn't be fair not to tell me now.'

Lucius slowly came to life again. 'What do you mean — "who they were?"' I don't know what you are talking about.'

'I saw some men go in after you, Lucius, and no one came out again before I left, and that was some time after.'

'Well,' said Lucius, as though making a great effort. 'I'll tell you. They're some friends of mine that I want to meet occasionally in order to talk things over. I tell them about my troubles and they tell me about theirs. We can't meet at any of our houses because they are all in some difficulty, just as I am, or am supposed to be, and if we were seen to be meeting at any well-known house, like this one, there's no telling what Caesar's spies might make of it. We're just being careful over our personal difficulties, and that's all you need to know. So don't worry further, my dear, and don't ask any questions. You can trust me not to get into any trouble if that's what you're afraid of.'

'Who were the men, Lucius?'

'You don't know any of them, Metella, except Cassius Chaerea, the Praetorian officer — you know him well —'

'Oh,' said Metella, 'Cassius Chaerea? Yes, of course, I know him. He's a favourite of the Emperor, isn't he? Are you trying to work against Aulus then, through Chaerea? And who are the others whom you say I don't know?'

'You don't know them, Metella, and they aren't of any consequence. Now don't ask any more questions to-night, my dear, and to-morrow you will have forgotten all about it. There's nothing to worry about. You can tell that yourself because Cassius Chaerea is in it. He always was the Emperor's man.'

Metella, unsatisfied, determined to ask more questions in the morning. But in the morning — this was the twenty-first day of the month — Pericles came to tell them about Aulus's visit to the Emperor and what they might now expect. Pericles had received a visit late on the night before from one of the Emperor's secretaries whom he had made his friend. The secretary had been immensely excited over the events of the day — the order to Sextus Cornelius, the coming of his son, the bullying rage and malicious gentleness of the Emperor and his final promise to Aulus. The secretaries had described to each other the separate experiences that they had had and now Pericles's friend came to tell him the whole story.

'Aulus Cornelius,' he said, 'will be returning to claim his audience on the twenty-fifth day. It is all arranged.' The secretary thought that the Emperor, provided he was good-tempered at the moment, would give Aulus all he wanted; on the other hand, he might take it into his head to execute Aelia Memmia because she had been the wife of Sextus Cornelius and gleefully tell Aulus to come back again some time later. The only certain thing at present was that Aulus was to have his audience. Pericles, who had been making his own inquiries, added that Sextus Cornelius had taken his life by opening his veins on the evening of the twentieth, that his body was to be cremated on the twenty-second, and that Aulus, immediately after the cremation, meant to go to his villa in the Volscian hills south of Rome. He would spend the twenty-third day and part of the twenty-fourth there, and would return late on the twenty-fourth, so as to make sure of appearing punctually for his appointment with the Emperor on the twenty-fifth. His slaves, from whom this information had been obtained, also reported that Thyrsus was going

to join him on the twenty-third and return with him to Rome on the following day.

'We are safe, at any rate,' said Lucius, 'until after the funeral to-morrow and probably for four days in all — until he sees the Emperor on the twenty-fifth. We must think what to do.'

'I'm going to see Aulus,' said Metella, 'and prevent him from going to Caesar again.'

'You will do no such thing,' protested Lucius. 'You know it would be fatal. He would have you at his mercy. Leave it alone. There's no telling. Perhaps Caesar will refuse to see him after all or will be ill or will have left Rome — you don't know what he will do at an hour's notice. What do you think, Pericles? You agree, don't you?' His voice trembled. He demanded Pericles's support urgently.

'Yes,' said Pericles, and he addressed Metella. 'There is nothing, madam, to be gained by your going to Aulus Cornelius. He would know that you were afraid of him and I fear that the death of his father, and his horrible experience at Caesar's hands, will have made him merciless. We must just wait.'

'Wait!' cried Metella. 'What else have we done, and what has come of it? Only that we have four days to wait until we are all destroyed. Wait and wait and wait! I will wait no longer. I am going after Aulus Cornelius when he goes to his Volscian farm whether anyone likes or not.' She was indignant, but she put her arm through Lucius's and said to him gently, 'I must do it, Lucius, I must see him. There is no other hope. You can trust me, you know.'

Lucius sat down on a stool looking down at the ground. 'I must think a bit,' he said. 'If we make a mistake now it will be our last.' Presently, standing up, he spoke deliberately to Metella. 'You may be right. I can't tell. I've gone over it all so often that I don't know now what is good and what is bad. I can't see through it all. I don't see how you can succeed. You can't bribe him. You can't frighten him and I don't think you can persuade him. But you can try. You can go to our farm at Antium to-morrow before he is due to leave Rome and you can go to his villa in the mountains on the following day. But there is one condition. I am coming with you to Antium. Then you can go on alone to the villa on the next day if you insist, but I shall come

with you almost all the way and I shall be waiting ready close at hand in case you do not reappear quickly. If you don't I shall come in and fetch you out.'

Metella smiled at her success. 'I agree,' she said, 'and we will settle later how long you give me to persuade Aulus Cornelius before you break in and rescue me. But you will see,' she added, her high spirits returning to her, 'I shall persuade him to do nothing at least for a few days, and who knows whether our fortune will not change? Perhaps Aulus Cornelius — you know how he has wavered — is already regretting his appointment with Caesar.'

CHAPTER VIII

At this moment Aulus Cornelius had Thyrsus with him. On the previous evening he had sent to inform Thyrsus of his father's death and to ask him to assist in making the arrangements for the funeral. He was now settling the last details. He had said nothing to show that he had discovered the disappearance of Metella's letter. Now he said — 'My father has left you a legacy; he had always a high opinion of you. You must help me in settling his affairs, which are complicated. I am going down to the Volscian farm to-morrow afternoon immediately after the funeral. I want you to come there on the next day, bringing all the papers that we shall need — there are a lot of them — and we can go through them there in peace. I had arranged to see the Emperor on the twenty-fifth about the affair you know of, but very likely I may put it off again, so you need not fear at present' — he gave Thyrsus a smile — 'that those famous plans of yours are going to be upset.' Thyrsus nodded pleasantly in reply. He would, he promised, set off in good time on the twenty-third, and would certainly arrive at the villa by the evening.

It was at least a five hours' journey for Lucius and Metella to the farm near Antium, especially as the weather had been bad and the going would be slow, so they proposed to start from Rome not later than midday. When the time came near, how-

ever, Lucius sent word from his office that he was detained by urgent business and could not arrive to join Metella until the middle of the afternoon; they would not reach the farm until long after dark but it did not matter since he would be with her. Again, however, he did not arrive at the time which he had fixed but sent a messenger saying that it was still impossible for him to get away and that she should start without further delay. He would follow, but it was now likely, he said, that he would have to postpone his start until late at night; he would arrive as soon after dawn as he could and she could rely on his being there in good time before she set out to find Aulus Cornelius.

Metella was perturbed. She was determined to visit Aulus alone, but she could not bear the thought that Lucius would not be with her on the way. She was tormented by the fear that his absence was somehow connected with his mysterious meetings. She had asked no more questions because she had his promise to be with her at Antium and now she dreaded lest, when she had left Rome, something should happen, something should have been arranged, to keep him from her, to endanger him. Still, she would, she must, go. She meant to see Aulus and she was sure that nothing imaginable would keep Lucius from accompanying her to the door of Aulus's house and from standing on watch in order to bring her away safely. She told Iris that the Master had sent word for them to start and they would delay no more. Iris received the news with satisfaction. When she heard that her mistress meant to seek out Aulus, and that Thyrsus was expected to be there, she had said only one abrupt sentence to Metella — 'You will take me with you?' and from the moment she had heard the answer 'Yes' she had gone about her work with a purposive, contented gravity.

Soon after three o'clock, with the day already waning, they set out, with a dozen slaves as escort. Lucius thought it possible that Aulus, if he knew what they were doing, might have arranged an attack on them, and when he sent word that he could not accompany his wife, he increased the strength of the escort. Their journey took them more than six hours. The night was dark and when they left the high road they found the cart track leading to the farm soft and boggy from heavy rains. There was little more than two hours left before midnight when they reached the

farm. Metella told the steward who received her that his master might arrive at any time, but probably not till the early morning. She would have waited up for him had she been certain that he would come during the night, but she was tired and she knew that she would need all her energy the next day. Bad as the journey from Rome had been it would be worse later, for Aulus's villa was right up in the hills, and though the distance was not great the country to be crossed would be extremely disagreeable. So, as soon as they had had hot baths, which were ready because a messenger had been sent on the day before to warn the steward of their coming, and some food, they went to bed, Iris in a small room close to that of her mistress.

Metella slept late. The day was fully up when she opened her eyes, but she thought it was barely dawn so little light was entering the room. Then, looking round, she found that Iris was standing by her bed, looking at her with a woebegone expression. 'What is the matter?' said Metella, suddenly realizing that something was wrong. Iris replied by pointing a hand forlornly at the two windows. Metella, looking, saw why so little light was entering the room. Each of the windows was half-blocked by bars or poles that had been fixed outside; the framework was held rigidly in position by a stout pole driven deep into the ground and secured at the top to the stones of the house.

'We are prisoners,' said Iris. 'The master has imprisoned us. The steward sent me in to tell you. He received orders yesterday morning to keep us here until the master arrives. He says it will not be until the day after to-morrow. If you resist he is to use force. He says he must carry out his orders, but he did not know how to tell you. So he sent me. I could have run away and I would have if I could have gone to anyone who could help you. But I knew no one; they would all be on his side. He said that he had a letter for you from the master. We were to knock on the door.'

Metella hastily put some clothes on, while Iris, going to the windows, shook and pulled at the bars, but they were too stout and well-fixed to be in the least shaken.

'Knock!' said Metella.

Iris knocked, the door was opened just enough to admit the steward, and was instantly closed behind him. He held out a

letter to Metella, 'From the master,' he said, and waited. Metella read the letter —

'I am sorry, my dearest wife, to do this to you but I hope that soon you will forgive me. I cannot leave Rome at present and I cannot let you go to visit Aulus Cornelius. I deceived you, I know, shamefully. I never meant to go with you to the farm because I must stop in Rome for a few days. I will tell you why when I see you next, which should be on the day that Aulus Cornelius has fixed for his request to Caesar. I hope all will then be well and that you and I will be spared further anxiety. In the meantime trust me, for I love you more than ever, and I cannot bear the thought that if you were to see Aulus I might lose you altogether. You know that you are more to me than all the world. If you are my prisoner for a day or two, I have been yours for all that matters of my life and I shall be so still, and more than ever, when I hold you in my arms again as, at this moment, I long to do. You must not blame the servants since they can only obey me. Blame me, if you must, but forgive.'

Metella looked at the steward. 'You must carry out your orders. If I promise that I will make no attempt to escape, can I go about the farm until my husband comes?'

The steward shook his head. 'No,' he said, looking uncomfortable.

'Can I go where I like inside the house, then?'

'No,' said the steward. 'I am sorry.'

'Can this girl go about to get me things if I stop here?'

'No, that is forbidden. I think the master does not trust her. There is a servant who is to do that sort of thing for you.' He opened the door, beckoned, and an old woman slave who had known Metella all her life and was very fond of her, came in.

'I see,' said Metella. 'Then we still stop here. You can take those bars away from the windows, I suppose?'

'No,' said the steward once more. 'They are there lest you should try to escape. If you are not both here when the master comes I shall get into trouble. He has said so.'

'Bring some food, then.' Metella turned away in disgust.

She sat down on her bed. 'So this is the end,' she said to Iris, 'of my fine plan for settling things with Aulus Cornelius.'

'And with Thyrsus. That was part of it.'

'But what is happening?' said Metella, miserably. 'What is it all about?' She was thinking of Lucius and speaking to herself. 'What is he seeing all these people for and refusing to tell me, and why does he say he cannot leave Rome and he hopes that by the day after to-morrow he will see me again, and that all will then be well? If only I knew what he is doing. If only I could go to him.'

The woman servant entered with food. 'Come,' said Metella to Iris, 'we may as well eat. We can't escape so far as I can see, but if we do it won't help to be starving. And bring a lamp,' she said to the woman, 'and some books and my work.' She gave her close directions. 'Or perhaps,' she added, 'the master has had my work-room boarded up and barred so that I can work in comfort there?' The old woman only smiled affectionately and said — 'Be patient, child; the master will soon be here and then everything will come right. He always knows what is best for you.' Metella grimaced with indignation. 'At all events,' she said to Iris, 'if we get a light we'll be able to read and sew, and if they keep us here too long we might upset the lamp and escape when they come to put out the fire.'

'Shall we try it now?' said Iris hopefully, and was downcast when Metella laughed at her.

The morning went slowly for them, though they read and worked and talked, and Metella, for the hundredth time, went over everything that Lucius had done and said and the message that he had sent and wondered whether he was intending to kill Aulus, but in that case why meet Cassius Chaerea and his friends secretly by night? And if there was some plot afoot, and if it were discovered, or if, being attempted, it failed in the execution, then Lucius and the rest of them were doomed. The thought of the danger stirred her spirit and she walked up and down the room, wishing that she could be with Lucius, and seeing in imagination his great need and the help that she could give him.

Early in the afternoon they heard voices in the distance. They thought that they could hear the steward arguing. 'Is it the master?' asked Iris. 'You know his voice! — listen! has he come

to release us? He said he wasn't coming until the day after to-morrow, so if he has come now it must be to release us, and perhaps we shall visit Aulus Cornelius and Thyrsus after all?"

'There's a woman there!' said Metella. 'I can hear her. And it's not Lucius, either, though I'm sure I know the voice. Quick! They're coming here.'

The door opened and Pericles and Lollia Claudia came in. The steward spoke to Metella. 'They have come straight from the master. They say that they have his orders to give you and the girl freedom until he comes. I hope you will make it right for me with the master if I have done wrong. He wrote to me quite plainly that you were to be shut in here and on no account let out, but now they say that I am to do the opposite — and I don't know what to do.'

'You are doing right,' said Metella, 'to obey them. I will see that if anything goes wrong the master understands. Now,' turning to Lollia and Pericles — 'tell me at once. I must hear everything. How is my husband? What have you come to say? There's nothing wrong with him, is there?'

'No,' said Pericles, 'Lucius Paetus was well when we left Rome.' He looked inquiringly at Lollia.

'You tell her,' said Lollia. 'It is your story.'

'Quick!' cried Metella.

'The young master,' said Pericles, 'came to see me yesterday. He brought a new will which he had made. He told me that he had sent you here and that as you were resolved to see Aulus Cornelius alone he had ordered that you should be kept shut up here until he could come and take charge of you again. That, he said, would be on the twenty-fourth — to-morrow in the evening — by which time he hoped to have finished the business which kept him in Rome. If everything went well, he said, there would be no need to trouble me about you and your children, but if things should go ill, then you would all be in great peril and there were certain things that he relied on me to do. What he said meant to me quite clearly that something dangerous, on which everything depends, is going to happen in Rome to-morrow morning, and he is in it whatever it may be.'

'He sent no fresh orders to the steward about releasing you,' added Lollia. 'We made that up.'

‘I know what he is doing,’ Metella gripped Lollia’s arm hard. ‘It’s clear now. He’s in a plot to murder Caesar. Isn’t that it?’

Lollia nodded and Pericles struck in. ‘Yes, I have no doubt about it. So that Aulus will be unable to do you any injury.’

‘I should have thought,’ said Metella, ‘that it would have been better to do away with Aulus. That would have settled everything.’

‘No, it would not,’ Lollia was emphatic. ‘You’re wrong there. Caesar would avenge his favourite. Lucius and all of you would be wiped out. But that’s what’s likely to happen anyhow so far as I can see if Lucius takes part in murdering Caesar. That’s why I’ve come here. I have no sympathy with Gaius. I think he is Rome’s disaster and that Rome would be well rid of him. But, mark my words, every soul that takes part in the murder of Caesar, if he is murdered, will be put to death.’

‘Won’t the new Caesar, whoever he is,’ asked Metella, ‘be grateful to those who have put him into Caesar’s place? He’ll owe it to them, Lollia.’

‘No, he will only remember that if one Caesar can be murdered, so can another. He will feel a need to discourage the fashion. If Lucius takes part in the assassination, he is as good as dead.’

‘That is why we have come, madam,’ Pericles was urgent. ‘We thought that if you would return to Rome with us to-day, and then dissuade the young master from joining in to-morrow — it is the only chance.’

‘And a poor one, I fear,’ said Lollia, ‘since he will have pledged his word.’

‘It is useless, entirely useless,’ said Metella, in the firmest voice. ‘He would not only not listen to me but he would shut me up more rigorously than he has done here until it was all over and he was dead, if the attempt failed, or doomed if it succeeded. No, we must think of something better than that.’ She fell into thought while the others waited, watching her. Then, ‘I have a plan,’ she said, ‘which we can try, which we will try. It has the advantage’ — she gave a dry little laugh — ‘of enabling me to carry out my own scheme while depriving Lucius, if we succeed, of the chance of succeeding in his. It has one weakness; he will have to fail his friends in Rome. He will have to leave Rome to-morrow morning. He would do that for me, and for me alone,

and he will hate doing it. But I think he will do it. Very well, then, to-night I am going to ride, with Iris, to visit Aulus at his farm. I will have a settlement with him there. You two will return to Rome now, and before dawn to-morrow morning Pericles will tell my husband that he has been here, that he found me freed, and that early to-morrow I am going to Aulus Cornelius in order to put myself in his hands so that Lucius may be spared. He will believe it and he will come to me. He will take six hours and more from Rome, with the roads as they are now, and by the time he reaches Aulus's villa whatever is to be done in Rome to-morrow will have been done without him.'

'And if he doesn't believe that you are one to put yourself in Aulus's hands — any more than I do?' said Lollia dryly.

'Then,' replied Metella, 'he will think that I am going to quarrel with Aulus and he will come just the same.'

'And you are going to "quarrel" with him, to use your pretty phrase?'

'I am going to end it one way or another, Lollia. I am tired of it all — of the hints and the threats, of trying to remember exactly what Lucius said about Caesar, and what I said myself, of waiting and wondering night and day what is going to happen to Lucius, and to the children if anything should happen to him, and to all of them if they should be left without me. Anything is better than to go on with that — that's what I think now. So I'm going to see Aulus Cornelius and what I shall do I shan't know till I see him, but I am not going to surrender myself to him and I am not going to live any longer possessed by fear as I am now.'

Lollia clapped her hands softly. 'If we kill him, Metella, it will be in self-defence.'

'That is what it is going to be, Lollia. That is what I shall say. No one will be able to contradict me. It will do well enough.'

'The thought of it will do well enough,' said Lollia, 'to bring Lucius to you, I'm sure. He will be frank with Cassius Chaerea, who is a fine, generous man, and will understand his action.'

Metella addressed Pericles. 'You had better be getting back now. Give yourself time. I trust you completely. Say anything you like about me that will get Lucius out of Rome early to-morrow morning.' She looked at Lollia and was suddenly

puzzled. 'Why did you say "if *we* kill him", Lollia? You're going with Pericles?'

: 'Not I indeed. I'm going with you. Iris is coming, too? Very well then, we shall see how Aulus Cornelius stands up to three Roman women.' She waved a hand gaily towards Iris. 'She's not a Roman, but she's as good as one. Really, it's not fair to Aulus Cornelius.'

Pericles had to have food before he left, and while he was eating and drinking they asked him whether he had had much difficulty in getting away from Claudius. He replied that, indeed, he had. His patron had insisted that he must be away for only one day. 'The reason is that he is now busy every day and almost every night writing his history of Carthage. He is going to include a chapter on the use of elephants by the Carthaginians during the Punic wars: the ways in which they were employed and the methods by which the Romans met them. It is my task to collect the material and I find it most fascinating. Sometimes, you know, the Romans were very awkwardly placed. The Carthaginians would attack a Roman rampart from the backs of elephants and the Romans naturally would kill the elephants, but then the carcasses of the great beasts would fill up the trench which protected the rampart and the Carthaginians would come swarming over them to the attack. Of course the Romans had many devices to drive the elephants off before they came to close quarters — flaming faggots thrown in front of them and balls of iron studded all round with sharp spikes for them to tread on. I am supposed to furnish my patron to-morrow morning with a summary of what the Roman historians, Livy included, have said on the subject, and how I'm going to get it done I don't know. Why, I could quote you thirty passages at least out of Livy alone —'

'No, no, Pericles,' protested Metella, 'we know you could, but you must be starting. Do as my father did — read and think while you ride. It will make the journey shorter and you will have everything ready in your head for the admirable Claudius by the time you get to Rome.'

'He will be cross if I haven't,' said Pericles. 'He's most impatient if everything isn't ready for him on the dot. Yes, I'd better be off.'

Metella said to Pericles, as he bade her farewell, 'See that my husband comes safely to me to-morrow, Pericles. If he does, I promise you that we shall at last be at the end of our troubles.' Pericles replied — 'I promised Publius Antonius that I would take care of both of you. Lucius Paetus shall leave Rome early to-morrow and he shall be with you by the afternoon.' With a grave salute he rode away.

'Now,' said Lollia, who was ready to take charge, if need be, of the whole expedition, 'what about horses, Metella? It's thirty miles, isn't it, to where we are going?'

'More,' replied Metella, 'I should think it's thirty-five. I'm going to send slaves off now to the Appian Road. We join it thirteen miles from here, ride twelve miles down it to the south and then break off towards the mountains. The slaves will get horses at the post-houses on the road and have them ready at the points where we join and leave it. We start from here at midnight and meet Aulus with the dawn.'

CHAPTER IX

THEY set out in thick darkness, all of them riding, with half a dozen slaves. They had decided not to use any carriage or cart because it would probably stick altogether in the marshy country which awaited them in the second part of the journey. The slaves would accompany them along the Appian Road, but it was very unlikely that there would be horses enough to take them farther, so the three women reckoned that they would do the last, and the worst, part of the journey alone. The first stretch as far as the great road from Rome to the south was not in itself unpleasant. But it was threatening, for the three or four streams over which the road passed were swollen, and they could see that the fields on either side were under water. They reached the road, however, in good time, changed horses and turned southwards. After a few miles they came to the beginning of the Pontine Marshes. Here the road was carried on a causeway. As far as the eye could see there stretched a stagnant, swampy desolation with the water from innumerable streams lapping along the stones or

gurgling sullenly under their feet as it passed beneath an occasional low bridge. 'I must say, Metella,' said Lollia, as they came suddenly to a spot where the floods had eaten a chunk out of the causeway and one of the horses nearly fell into the bog, 'You might have chosen a suitor with a better taste in marshes. This is not at all an elegant approach to his estate. If he has to be killed, which I don't dispute, he should be unselfish enough to come to you, not make you go to him.'

'You'll like the journey less the farther you go,' retorted Metella. 'I've been here before. This is the best part, I assure you. The streams are out there' — she waved a hand at the darkness — 'and we are riding raised up high and dry above them. Presently we have to leave this solid causeway and strike out for the mountains. There's a track, but it's on the level of the streams and the difficulty is to distinguish between track and stream and swamp. Sometimes they seem to be all one, you know, with no difference between them, but of course there is a difference, and it's awkward if you don't see it in time. The swamps are deep, they say.'

'It would make an awful mess of my clothes,' said Lollia. 'I think I shall let you see Aulus alone, Metella. He won't expect anything from you, but I'm unmarried and have to think of appearances.'

Lollia encouraged them by a ceaseless flow of impudent chatter until, just before four in the morning, they reached the point on the road where they were to strike off for the mountains. There slaves were waiting with fresh horses. After a short rest the three women went on. The going became much worse. The track was narrow, but in dry weather it was a tolerable cart road. There existed hedgers and ditchers, mostly old men who had done little else all their lives, who looked after the surface, built up the edges, and cleared the gutters by which the water was led to the occasional drains beneath the road. But at this time the road was covered with slime, its surface sometimes broken, and half its breadth fallen away into the ditches. A dozen streams had to be crossed, all of them in flood. Some of them had spread extensively so that the track near to the river channel — and it was hard to follow — was inches deep in water. What was worse, two of the bridges had been carried away and the women had to grope their

way for a mile or more upstream until they could find a place where it was safe to ford, after which they had to feel their way back to the other side of the broken bridge in order to get on the forward road again. When at last they came out on the further side of the swamps and saw their road beginning to climb steadily up the hillside towards the little town of Setia, they were wet, weary and bedraggled. 'I give you warning, Metella,' said Lollia, 'that sooner than come this way again I will kill Aulus Cornelius with my own hands. I didn't know there were such horrible places in Italy. Why doesn't someone drain it? I believe they're always talking about it and then they do nothing. My face must be terrible. I'm glad no one can see me.' She looked suddenly at Iris. 'Why doesn't the girl talk out loud? She's said scarcely a word since we started that I can understand, but she's muttering or singing to herself all the time. She isn't frightened, is she? She never used to be.'

'No,' said Metella, 'she's not frightened. She's as little frightened as you, and much less than I. I expect she's repeating things out of her sacred books — the Jews' books I mean — all about what their god is going to do to his enemies Aulus Cornelius and Thyrsus. She puts great reliance in him whenever she or her friends are in trouble, and he's pretty terrible, I can tell you. What is it you've been saying, Iris?'

Iris repeated slowly in a low voice —

'Through the window she looked forth, and cried,
The mother of Sisera, through the lattice,
Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?
So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord!'

'I see,' said Lollia. 'That's for Aelia Memmia, Aulus's mother, unless Thyrsus has a mother, which I don't think he has. Very nicely put, too.'

Iris spoke again in the same quiet tone —

'Blessed be the Lord God, which hath created the heavens
and the earth, which hath directed thee to the cutting off of
the head of the chief of our enemies.'

Iris addressed herself to Lollia. 'That refers to Judith, from whom

I take my Jewish name. She cut off the head of our enemy Holofernes.'

Lollia smiled complete approval. 'Why, yes, everything's clear,' she said. 'We know just what's expected of us. I must say I like this God.'

Iris raised her voice in exultation —

'O Lord, thou are great and glorious, wonderful in strength and invincible. The mountains shall be moved from their foundations with the waters, the rocks shall melt as wax at thy presence.'

'Good,' said Lollia, 'we shall want the help of all the gods we can get, and this seems one of the best. I too am a pious woman, so I hereby vow that, if we come safely through, I will give my best ring to Apollo at his temple in Rome and a Tyrian cloak of softest wool to that charming priest of his, my dear Parmenio.'

The road was now rising steeply up a hill-side to Setia. Metella, riding on the outside and keeping a sharp eye on the ravine beneath, hardly took in the name. She spoke indifferently.

'Parmenio? Is he in Rome?'

'Yes,' replied Lollia, 'he's just come from Alexandria. A fascinating man, so modest and unselfish. He has already given a new meaning to worship at the temple. He told me, by the way, about your father's affection for him; he said that Publius Antonius had helped him greatly at a critical moment in his career. I met him while worshipping and I decided to put myself under his spiritual guidance. He has wonderful eyes, Metella. They literally draw you to him. Well, I don't mean you, of course, but me. Some women call them unfathomable, but I say that where there's a will there's a way. As a matter of fact, I think I shall give my ring to Parmenio and not to Apollo. The gods are so impersonal and, nowadays, reserved. I do like people to show their gratitude personally — you know what I mean.' She gave her hoarse chuckle, looking like a good-natured, friendly wolf.

'Take care you don't come in for his financial guidance, Lollia. His eyes will cost you something. Ah, see, we're coming into Setia.'

Setia was a thousand feet up from the marshy plain and they had another five hundred still to climb. The road was cut out

of the mountain'side and they could hear a swollen torrent roaring far beneath them while the rock face rose above on their right hand, and sometimes the overhanging boulders seemed about to crash down on their heads. At one place the drain which carried a small stream under the road had become blocked and the down-rushing water had washed the surface of the road away; they had to dismount and lead their frightened horses across the gap. At another place the mountainside, saturated by the rains, had slipped down on to the road and they had to grope their way downwards and round the obstruction from below. Neither Lollia's jests nor Metella's curt comments were any longer to be heard, while Iris, constantly at the front and always watching how to give her mistress instant help, abstained for the time from her dark, Jewish threatenings.

They reached at last the plateau on which Aulus's villa looked through a dense plantation down the valley and over the Pontine Marshes to the sea. When they were about a quarter of a mile from the house, and there were some faint signs of the dawn, they heard a stirring a few yards ahead in the trees by the side of the road. Advancing cautiously they found a horse tethered to a tree-trunk. They all dismounted.

'Lucius!' cried Lollia instantly. 'That's what it is. That's why he kept you two imprisoned. He's come to settle with Aulus Cornelius.'

Metella shook her head impatiently. 'Lucius is in Rome,' she said. 'He intends to be there to-night. That's why he met those people secretly. Nothing else makes sense. He has stayed in Rome to join in killing Caesar.'

'It's Thyrsus,' said Iris quietly. 'We know he was to join Aulus Cornelius yesterday, Pericles told us it was all arranged. He didn't come yesterday, but he's come now. He's left his horse here.' Stepping forward she put her hand on the horse's neck and body. 'He's been ridden hard and hasn't been here long. Look, the steam is still rising from him. Thyrsus has come, like us, at the dawn to visit Aulus. Thyrsus is with him now.'

Without speaking again they tied their horses to the trees. Then they walked steadily towards the house. They moved quietly as though a whisper might betray them and there was no sound except of stones and the scuttle of some small animal hurry-

ing across the road. Then suddenly Lollia exclaimed sharply — 'There was someone there,' she said, pointing. 'He was watching us. I could see his eyes, but he's gone now. Listen!' and they heard the sound of hurried footsteps as someone retreated under the trees.

'One of the slaves, I dare say,' said Metella, trying to be helpful, 'though what he should be doing out here at this hour I don't know. Come on!'

Presently they were in front of the house, a long, low building, which stood back from the road, with the plantation flanking it on the two sides but bare on the front, towards the plain below. They stopped under the last trees to consider whether they should go boldly up to the door, knock and ask for Aulus, or whether they should creep quietly round the building, looking for someone who would let them in before the whole household was afoot. There was no sound.

'The door's open,' said Metella. 'You can see into the hall. Someone has gone in or come out. Why, you can see right through it to the court behind the hall. All the doors seem to be open. Look, there's a light that's showing from some room into the court. It doesn't amount to much but you can see the glow. It doesn't move or flicker; it must be coming from one of those inner rooms. I'm going in to see.'

'We're all going in to see,' said Lollia. 'Do you know this place? Have you been here before, Metella?'

'A long time ago, when I was a child. There's first the hall — you can see it there — and then the court. The servants' quarters are on the left of the court, and on the right there are some rooms. Aulus has two rooms — a dining-room and a sort of study beyond it. That light is coming from his study lamp; it shines through the dining-room and into the court where we can see its glow. But what does it all mean, with the door open and that man at the roadside, and Thyrsus somewhere in there — if that was his horse — and the light that does not change and nothing to be heard? I believe the slaves have fled the house and that man was one of them — unless it was Thyrsus himself. We're going to find out what is happening. But quietly! Whatever it is, we must take them by surprise. Maybe they're all asleep, but I don't understand the lamp.'

Stepping on to the grass which bordered a path up to the doorway, she moved slowly forward. Iris came next and then Lollia, who whispered loudly to Iris — 'Now then, it's time for that god of yours to show what he can do — move the mountains and melt the rocks, you know — and for Apollo, too, and priest Parmenio.'

Metella sent back a warning 'Hush!' They stood at the doorway. They could look right through the hall and into the court. The shaft of light came steadily from the inner rooms and could be seen more clearly. Walking stealthily through the hall, they stopped dead suddenly at the entrance to the court. For now they could hear a slow, painful heaving of the breath, punctuated by an occasional soft, gurgling noise, while a simultaneous breathing from some other throat was so loud and regular that it sounded like a snore. They listened speechless, looking at each other and then away in order to listen again, their faces questioning and haggard in the half-dark. Then, as if irresistibly compelled to discover the truth at last, they moved forward all together into the court, but this time Iris suddenly laid her hand on her mistress's arm, stepped in front of her and was the first to reach the beam of light. It glinted for a second on the dagger which she had always worn next to her body and which was now in her hand.

Still nothing happened. Standing at the door of the dining-room and looking in, they saw that everything was quiet, nothing was disturbed or out of place, the light came placidly from a lamp which, through the half-open inner door, could just be seen against the wall of the room, Aulus's study. There was no sound except for the strange breathing of those whom they could not yet see and who were waiting for them. Again, with Iris leading, they walked across the dining-room, pushed the inner door wide open and looked into the study.

Facing them was Thyrsus, but nothing of him could be seen except his head. In a struggle of which the traces were visible a big chair had been overturned. It was now lying on its side. Resting on the top of it, fixed and unmoving as though it had been severed from his body, was the head of Thyrsus. His eyes and mouth were shut; a deep, broad gash showed in his forehead; a rapid droning, almost snoring, breath came from him. A heavy stool, also overturned, lay on the floor a foot or two from the chair. The signs were not hard to read. Thyrsus, struck violently by

the stool, had collapsed unconscious upon the chair, his chin leaning on the edge, his head fixed, his body and legs wedged motionless between the chair and the wall. His face, always pale and white, was drained of blood; even from the gaping wound on his forehead no blood dropped now.

They turned their eyes leftwards, behind the door. There against the wall they saw Aulus in another armchair which was still standing upright. He was lying in it sideways, his knees drawn up towards his middle, one hand clutching at the base of his neck, from which a blood-stain was spreading downwards over his cloak. His eyes were open, his face was stiff and stretched with pain, his breath came in violent, spasmodic jerks. The soft, gurgling sound came from some internal convulsion that brought drops of blood from his mouth.

Metella in a moment was bending over him. 'Get some water,' she said to Iris. 'Bring some cold water at once, then light a fire if there isn't one, and make some water hot. Lollia, find something that will make bandages. He's been stabbed. There must be some slaves somewhere. They'll tell you where things are.' She stood back and looked at Aulus until in a few seconds the others returned. 'He doesn't recognize me. I believe he's dying,' she said. Thyrsus has killed him.'

The name brought life back into Aulus's eyes. The fixed stare gave way to recognition. 'Metella,' he said, 'and Lollia Claudia, and the Jewess.' He spoke in short gasps, refused the water that was offered him and kept his hand over his wound.

'No use,' he said, 'too late. Thyrsus has killed me.' He moved his head slightly round so as to see Thyrsus, and a violent spasm of pain shook him. Then the corners of his lips went down in a smile. But I beat him,' he said. 'Thyrsus died first.' He stretched out one hand to Metella, but as she bent forward towards him, it dropped limply on his knee. 'Metella,' he said, 'your letter to Lucius — he's sent it to Caesar's secretary — get it from the secretary — go back to Rome and get it somehow from the secretary — before it's too late. He told me what he'd done with the letter and then he said that I was the only living person who knew he was a murderer and could give him up to justice and that he would only be safe when I was dead. He said, too, that I knew about his birth, that he wasn't a prince but was born the son of

a slave — he couldn't endure that, he would stop my mouth and then he was on me and as I jumped he stabbed me in the neck. I got away, I threw a stool at him and picked it up again and hit him hard. I don't remember any more.'

The voice of Iris, loud and sharp, broke in. 'Look! look!' She was pointing with out-thrust arm. 'Thysus! Look! He's alive.'

The eyes of the unmoving head were opening slowly. Presently they were wide open, looking straight in front with a fixed stare. Then the mind behind them began to struggle with something that it had dimly heard but could not yet understand. The eyes looked at the three women, lingered over Iris, dwelt long on Metella. It seemed that the mind was telling Thysus — 'Those are the women — you remember the shed at the farm and the young Jewish slave — and that is the woman, the mistress, who had you flogged; that is Metella, who had you flogged, who had you flogged.' Thysus took in the message. His gaze travelled for a minute to the helpless Aulus, then back again to Metella. Hatred, resolve, revenge, were written on his face. His eyes remained fastened on Metella.

They watched, fascinated. Then suddenly, 'Take care! take care!' said Aulus. 'He's coming. Metella, go! I beg you to go. Iris — Lollia — take her away. It's Metella he wants. Take her away!'

The head was slowly rising from its resting place on the couch as though it existed separately. Then the neck could be seen and the shoulders from which head and neck were being raised. Then there were scuffling sounds behind the chair as the unseen body and legs, obeying the peremptory spirit, gripped the floor, pressed against it and lifted the man erect.

Aulus, muttering no one knew what, clawed at the chair, dropped his feet to the floor, forced himself up, stood for a second facing Thysus, and would have fallen on his face had not Metella caught him, put her arm round him and held him firmly until she had lowered him gently into the chair again. She took no notice of Thysus, but bathed Aulus's mouth with the cold water and tried to staunch the blood, now flowing fast from his neck.

Thysus, having balanced himself for a moment against the overturned chair, was slowly moving round it into full view.

The knife with which he had stabbed Aulus was in his hand. It had lain on the floor beside him, and when he recovered consciousness his hand had gone instinctively to it. He was now entirely concentrated on Metella. He began to advance very slowly towards her across the room. His steps were delicate; he moved lightly as though he scarcely touched the floor. Lollia screamed and he stopped dead, but he did not look at her or take his eyes off Metella. He only apprehended that there was some check, some danger, and was waiting to see what it might be. When Lollia cried aloud, 'The stool! get the stool, Iris! Hit him with the stool,' he still did not look at her but shifted slightly sideways so that he stood between the stool and the women; then he waited again. He was like an automaton, like something actuated by a power outside himself. But when Lollia cried 'Wait, I'll get something from the other room,' and ran back into the dining-room, something warned him that his last chance had come, and that he was about to be struck down. He drew himself up, stiffened, and launched himself across the room towards Metella. He took five rapid steps and found himself confronted by Iris, who, springing in front of her mistress, was standing with the dagger in her right hand and her left arm rolled in her cloak like a gladiator presenting his shield to the enemy. For a moment he checked, then lurched violently forward. Iris took one step backwards, thrust forward the cloaked arm and raised her dagger. But he was already falling. The spurt of life begotten of his hatred failed. As he crashed to the ground a lamp hurled by Lollia passed over his head and broke against the wall. Thyrsus lay still and did not move again.

Aulus held up his hand as though for silence, while he stared at the body. 'He's gone this time,' he said. 'Lucky for him! He must have broken in at the back of the house. I was just up when he came into my room, pretending to be friendly; then he attacked me. I meant to find out about your letter, Metella. I meant to get it from him if I could. Get it from that secretary before it reaches Caesar —'

His head dropped forward, but he raised it and spoke again about the letter, saying the same thing with despairing earnestness. 'I ought never to have kept it,' he said, 'but I could never bring myself to destroy it.'

'Why did you keep it, Aulus?' asked Metella, 'if you ~~were so~~ afraid of its being used to hurt me?'

'Because I meant myself to use it against you someday,' he said, 'if I couldn't get you away from Lucius Paetus any other way. If I couldn't have you, neither should he. Six years of exile and four of indecision! You were too much for me, incomparable Metella. One day I hated you and the next I loved you. I changed my mind a hundred times, always intending and never doing, always threatening what I would do and always afraid that I would lose you if I did it. That is no way to take a woman from her husband. But you should have married me, Metella, and I might have been Consul, Imperator, Censor and Augur, perhaps even Emperor when Rome had made an end of Gaius Caesar, my father's murderer, whom may the gods destroy!'

His voice failed and, when Metella could not hear him, he beckoned to her to bend down — 'The other letter,' he said, 'Lucius's letter, the one I was going to show to Caesar — in the other room — in the oak chest — take it with you.' When she nodded, saying 'Yes, Yes, I understand, I'll take it,' he rested his head on the back of the chair, as though satisfied and still looking at Metella but speaking to himself, he said 'Incomparable — invincible — foolish Metella!' He shut his eyes, opened them again, murmured 'Too good for that poor Lucius,' and died.

They were aware of sounds at the door and, turning, saw three or four frightened slaves looking in. One of them came forward. He explained that he was the steward. He had seen the ladies passing on their way to the villa, and he had come back to see what he could do to help.

'Why did you run away?' said Lollia harshly. 'Why didn't you stay to help your master? You will have to answer for it.'

The man was terrified. He said that he and his fellows had heard a sudden noise and loud voices. They had hurried to their master but had only arrived to find both him and Thyrsus apparently dead. Panic had seized them lest they should be accused of some part in the murder, or at least of not preventing it, and they had fled from the house. When he saw the ladies pass he had begun to think again and he had come back because he knew, he said, that they could confirm his story that the master was already beyond help.

‘Why didn’t you stay to look after him?’ insisted Lollia, ‘and how did you know that the murderer wouldn’t come to life and attack your master again, as in fact he nearly did? You deserted him.’

The steward and his companions protested miserably that there was nothing more they could have done, that they had done nothing wrong, that they might all have been accused of joining in the murder if they had been found on the scene.

‘Leave them alone, Lollia,’ said Metella. ‘You know it’s true. You know what happens. No one believes a slave, whatever he says, when his master is murdered. They would have been put to the torture until they confessed that they themselves had let Thyrsus into the house. It’s a good thing for them that we were here. ‘Now’ — she spoke to the steward — ‘send two of your men at once to Setia. Let them report to one of the magistrates what has happened to Aulus Cornelius, tell him that we are here and ask him to come at once, to take charge and receive our reports. Tell them to inform him who we are — ’

Before she could say who in fact they were, the steward interrupted to say that already, as soon as he and the others had abandoned the house, he had sent off three slaves with orders to hurry to Setia as fast as possible. The first to arrive was to report to the two magistrates and beg that one of them at least would come to the villa.

An hour before noon a magistrate arrived. He brought four guards with him and also the three slaves; he had had them roped together with their hands tied behind their backs lest they should be involved in the crime and should think of escaping. He was a perky, assertive little man, happy that such an important murder should take place within his jurisdiction. When he came from the hall into the court he found the two ladies and Iris waiting there.

‘You are relatives of Aulus Cornelius?’ he said curtly. ‘Where are the bodies? I must see them at once.’

‘We are not relatives,’ said Lollia Claudia. ‘We are friends of Aulus Cornelius. We came here to see him this morning and we saw him and the freedman die. I will tell you who we are.’

She was not allowed to finish. The magistrate turned abruptly on the three bound slaves. ‘You told me nothing of that,’ he said.

'You never mentioned that these women were on the scene.' You have been keeping evidence from me. For all you know, they may be connected with the murderer.'

The slaves protested that they had taken their orders from the steward, who had said nothing about any visitors.

'Where is the steward?' shouted the magistrate. He browbeat the wretched man, asking how it was that nothing had been said about these women having seen the two men die; and, besides, he would like to know what light the steward could throw on the questions why they were here, when they had arrived, what they did, and indeed who they were. There was a good deal that needed explanation, he said, and he looked at them with a displeasure which Lollia Claudia returned in good measure. 'If you can bring yourself to listen for a moment,' she said, 'I will tell you who we are, why and when we came and what we saw.' She explained with great firmness who she and Metella were and at what time they had arrived. 'We thought,' she said, 'that both Aulus Cornelius and the freedman were already dead —'

'And so,' interrupted Metella, 'did the slaves, with good reason.'

'But the freedman,' Lollia went on, 'recovered consciousness and would have killed my friend, but he suddenly collapsed, and his patron, Aulus Cornelius, died immediately after him. Nothing could have been done for either of them.'

'The slaves were not to blame,' said Metella.

'If you have any doubts about us,' added Lollia, 'you can refer to the Consuls in Rome and, for our part, we will report what we have seen direct to the Praetors there and not to you, and we will explain to them also how you have treated us.'

The magistrate, alarmed when he heard their names, protested that he meant no harm. He was only trying to do his duty. He had not known who the noble ladies were; he had been annoyed because he thought that the slaves were keeping something from him; he considered himself fortunate to have such trustworthy witnesses of the crime; he would now disclose to them that Aulus Cornelius had arranged with him to attend at noon that very day in order to arrest the freedman Thyrsus on a charge of murders committed at Miletus. Aulus Cornelius was to have supplied him with evidence. Thyrsus was to have been sent at once to Rome

and shipped off to Miletus for identification and trial as soon as possible. Well, it was a pity that Thyrsus had escaped the cross but Aulus Cornelius should have reported the facts sooner and then they could have protected him against attack. It was at any rate satisfactory that there was no doubt about what had happened that morning.

'Then,' said Metella, 'you will release the slaves?'

'Not at once,' replied the magistrate gravely. 'I must take down their account of what they saw. I must also record that they deserted their master and ran away. I must also have your report' — he addressed Metella and Lollia — 'on what happened from your arrival until the moment of death. Then I shall send the whole thing to the Praetor in Rome. I shall be glad if you will not leave the villa until I have taken your evidence.'

Metella explained that they had to wait for her husband who she expected would arrive early that afternoon. After that they would probably want to get back to Rome as soon as possible, so she hoped that the magistrate would get through his questioning quickly during the morning. He said that he would do his best as he must get his report into the Praetor's hands without delay. He hoped that the Praetor would notify the legal authorities at Miletus that the perpetrator of a famous murder had at last been run to earth by the magistrates of Setia.

Lucius Paetus arrived in the early afternoon. He brought two slaves with him but not Pericles. He came striding into the hall 'as though' — said Lollia — 'he was invading Britain' and threw his arms about Metella. He shot questions at her.

'Are you all right? Why did you come here? Where is Aulus Cornelius? What has happened?'

'Give me a chance to breathe,' said Metella, as he kissed her again and again, 'and I'll tell you everything. Aulus is dead, killed by Thyrsus. We came early this morning. I felt that I must settle things with Aulus once and for all. But Thyrsus was here first. He knew that Aulus had discovered about some murders that he committed long ago. He had stabbed Aulus, when we arrived and when he saw me he tried to kill me, too, but he had not the strength. Lollia insisted on coming with me, Lucius, and she and Iris defended me when Thyrsus came at me with his knife.'

'I threw a lamp at him,' said Lollia, 'and I missed. I'm sorry, Lucius.'

'I had my dagger ready,' said Iris, 'but he did not come within reach of it. I'm sorry, master.'

Lucius stretched out a hand to each. 'I thank you both. You shall be freed, Iris, when we get back to Rome.' Then he spoke to Metella again — 'Pericles came to see me before dawn to-day. He told me you were determined to come here. It was the only thing that would have brought me away from what I had to do in Rome this morning. I had bound myself in honour to be there, Metella.'

'Lucius, I know, but you must forgive me. I know what you were going to do. You were going to kill Caesar and, if the plan has been carried out, he is dead by now. But of what use would it have been to me to have had Caesar dead and you killed, as you certainly would have been for killing him? Aulus is dead and Caesar does not matter. What did you do about Cassius Chaerea?'

'I went to see him. He is a true friend. He accepted my word and said that he and the others would think no differently about me afterwards. He said he knew that I would not withdraw for anyone but you, and neither he nor the others would hold it against me. But I must get back at once. No one can tell what has happened or is happening in Rome. They may need my help. I must be with them, Metella, now I know you are safe.'

'There is nothing to stop us all from setting off at once, Lucius,' said Metella.

'Provided,' added Lollia, 'that this pompous little man from Setia doesn't keep Lucius under interrogation all the afternoon.'

The magistrate soon found that Lucius could tell him nothing of interest. He took down, however, a careful record of the way in which Thyrsus and Aulus had died and of Thyrsus's last attempt against Metella. He also took full notes of everything that bore on Thyrsus's grievances against Aulus, Metella and Pericles — the flogging at the farm, the scene at the auction when Aulus struck Thyrsus down, the hint given to Metella that he knew something which put Thyrsus in his power. 'My notes,' the magistrate said to Lucius, tapping him frequently on the chest in a confidential way, 'will be regarded as a classic report on a famous murder. I should say that it will be much in request for

many years among students of crime.' He hoped that Lucius would draw the attention of the Praetors to his having written the report.

'Are you saying in it,' asked Metella, 'that the slaves had nothing at all to do with the murder and that you are not therefore detaining any of them? Because, if you are not saying that, we shall have to tell the Praetors about it ourselves, but if it's in, we can tell them how we have admired your conduct of the inquiry.'

The magistrate said that he would certainly include an exoneration of the slaves, about whom he now had no doubt. He would try to get his report off to Rome that same night. He would say how much the noble ladies had helped him in his task. He wondered whether it might not be suggested to the Praetors that they should show his report to the Emperor, who, since he took so great an interest in the administration of justice, would be glad to know how conscientious were the magistrates, or at any rate one of them, at Setia.

Lucius Paetus nodded impatiently. They really must be starting, he said. The afternoon was getting on. It would be late at night before they reached Rome and 'God knows,' he said to Metella, 'what Rome will be like by the time that we get there.'

As they entered Setia they knew at once that something had happened. In the streets were groups of excited people talking loudly. Men and women were shouting the news to each other or running to their homes, spreading it as they went, or coming out of their houses at the sound of the hubbub. 'Listen!' said Lucius. Then they heard the cry — 'Caesar is dead,' and a man who was running past them stopped when he saw that they were strangers and said 'Caesar — he's dead — murdered this morning.' He was a farmer, hurrying back home, but Lucius seized him by the arm and said, 'How do you know? Is it certain? Where's the news from?'

'Couriers went down the Appian Way this afternoon,' was the answer. 'Two men from Setia had the word from them and came straight here with it. There's no doubt. The couriers were sent by the Consuls. They were on their way south.'

'What else? What happened afterwards?'

'I don't know,' said the man. 'You'd better ask them,' pointing down the main street to where a knot of men, the chief officials of the town, were gathered. 'All I know is that the Emperor Gaius has been murdered and no one knows who's going to take his place. Not,' he added, 'that it makes much difference to me.' Away he went to carry the news to the farms in the hills.

From the officials Lucius discovered that nothing was certain beyond what the farmer had already told him, but the two excited Setians who had brought the news up from the Appian Way had added much that they had themselves imagined. Their fellow-townsmen were not less inventive. Civil war had broken out; Rome was in flames; Rome was being sacked by the Praetorian Guard; the Senate had declared the four-year-old boy Nero, the nephew of Gaius, to be his successor and future Emperor, with some of their own number to act on his behalf; the Senate had chosen a Senator for Caesar; Nero had been murdered; the Senate had been massacred; the Senate had taken control into its own hands. Lucius discovered the second magistrate, colleague of the official whom they had left behind at the farm. He was a level-headed man who scoffed at the rumours. When he learned who the visitors were he was anxious to tell them precisely what news could be trusted. 'These poor people here,' he said, indicating his fellow-citizens, 'will' believe anything. The common people are sadly gullible. It is their lack of education. They are to be pitied rather than condemned. They are carried away by excitement and have no sense of evidence. I myself was sent to Athens to be educated. Now I will tell you without distortion or exaggeration exactly what has happened in Rome. The Emperor Gaius has been murdered; so have his nephew the child Nero and his uncle Claudius; the Senate has thanked the assassins, the Republic has been restored and the Praetorian Guard has been disbanded. You may take it from me that those are the facts. I should advise you to reject everything else.'

When Lucius tried to find out what ground there was for any report beyond the Emperor's death, the magistrate smiled wisely, nodded his head several times and said, 'I know what I am saying. Those are the simple facts. Don't believe anything else, whoever tells it to you. I regard it as a duty to be critical. Educated people must set a good example to their less fortunate neighbours'.

'Let's get on to Rome,' said Lucius, 'and find out for ourselves. We'll get Pericles to come to us before we go to bed to-night —'

Lollia agreed cheerfully. 'Always provided,' she said, 'that we don't find Rome in ashes and that we aren't prevented from reaching the house by the piles of corpses in the streets.'

'It may be bad enough without that,' said Lucius.

When, an hour before midnight, they entered Rome they found guards everywhere. The streets were almost deserted, but occasionally in the distance they could hear the sounds of shouting. They passed one or two groups of riotous, drunken soldiers. In the distance they could see the glow of a large fire.

'Looting,' suggested Lucius.

'Only one fire?' said Metella. 'Then Rome has got off easily.'

Lollia protested. 'The soldiers would do better than that, and so would the mob if they got going. I expect that's just one of our peaceful Roman conflagrations.'

At the foot of the Palatine Hill, with its great mansions, they found strong pickets stationed. When an officer stepped out to question them they recognized an acquaintance.

The officer looked curiously at the two women. 'Have you been in the country? I should get indoors if I were you. You know what's happened?'

'Yes,' said Lucius, 'we've been in the Volscian hills. We've heard about Caesar, but what else is there? Is it true that Claudius also has been murdered?'

'And the child Nero?' asked Metella. 'Surely they haven't murdered him? A baby of four!'

'Don't tell me that the Senate has thanked the assassins and restored the Republic,' said Lollia, 'because I know the Senate and I don't believe it.'

The officer laughed. 'One at a time! I must say you've collected some choice yarns. So far as I know, Nero is safe with his nurse. Claudius also is alive. He has been taken to the camp of the Praetorians.'

'Oho!' said Lollia, 'then the Praetorians have not been disbanded?'

'Disbanded!' The officer was enjoying the joke more and more. 'They've carried off uncle Claudius!'

'What on earth are they going to do with him?' asked Lucius.

The officer roared with laughter. 'I don't know. No one knows. They don't know themselves. They were seen carrying him off there this afternoon. Some people thought he was being taken to be killed, but I'm told that his captors were very jolly about it, and others think that they were only taking him away as a joke — to have sport with him in the camp.'

'You haven't told us,' complained Lollia, 'whether the Senate has restored the Republic. It might be quite important.'

'That talking shop!' said the officer contemptuously. 'I'd like to see it restoring anything. It's been talking all day, it's talking still, and it'll go on talking till the army tells it what's going to be done. Many years ago, Lollia Claudia, the Senate talked the Republic to death, and it'll take more than the Senate to talk the Republic back to life again. Now, I think you'd all be wise to get away home to the Esquiline. Rough soldiers are about. I think I'd better send an escort with you.'

They thanked him, but said they would not trouble him as they had not far to go and Lollia was staying with Lucius and Metella for the night. 'That man ought to be in the Senate,' said Lollia. 'He can talk with anyone.'

Lucius hurried them on. 'He said that the Senate was still sitting. So nothing can be settled. Let's make haste and get hold of Pericles.'

At the house they found a slave sent by Pericles waiting for their arrival. He hastened away and soon Pericles came, overjoyed to find Metella safe. Having told him briefly what had happened at Aulus's villa that morning, they asked him for all the news he had. He told them what was known about the death of Gaius, but about some things, he said, there was still uncertainty. From the moment of the murder the Palace has been rigorously cut off. The disappearance of his patron Claudius, carried away by the Praetorians, had added to the confusion. This was the story.

The plotters, headed by Cassius Chaerea and Cornelius Sabinus, were waiting in the Palace that morning before the time when the Emperor was expected to leave his bedroom. Their task was the easier because some of them belonged to the palace guard for the day and also because among their accomplices was Callistus, one of the Emperor's own freedmen. It was not certain,

Pericles said, but he was told that it was the part of Callistus to persuade Gaius towards the place where the conspirators were waiting for him. It looked at first as though the scheme might fail. The conspirators were waiting but Gaius did not come. He was reluctant to get up. At last, however, Callistus sent out word that the Emperor was coming. As soon as this was known the guard at the gate received orders to let no one into the Palace and some of those who had already entered it in order to wait on the Emperor were requested to leave on the ground that he had been taken ill. Some of the more distinguished visitors, such as Senators, were however still there when Gaius appeared. Being told that some noble youths from Greece who were to perform before him in a festival then being celebrated were busy rehearsing their parts, he went at once to see them. As he was passing through a narrow passage the conspirators fell upon him. Cassius Chaerea and Cornelius Sabinus stabbed him first, the others joined in and, as each wished to prove his fidelity to their pact, all dealt him many wounds.

When Pericles had finished Lucius nodded. All this, to his knowledge, was as it had been planned. Other deaths, he knew, had been spoken of.

'Was anyone else killed?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Pericles. 'The conspirators were thorough. They determined that Gaius should leave no family to afflict the State. Or at least they acted as though that was their plan. They slaughtered his wife Caesonia and dashed her infant daughter against a wall.' So far as Pericles knew, no one else had suffered death.

'What is all this about Claudius being carried off by the Praetorians?' asked Lucius. 'Are they going to murder him?' He knew that no seizure of Claudius had figured in the plans.

'One of the Praetorians found him hiding,' said Pericles, 'after Gaius had been killed. They say the man was looking for loot or something of the kind. Claudius was in the Palace and was afraid he would be killed. The soldier pulled him out of his hiding-place and recognized him. They say that the man saluted him as Caesar; at any rate there is no doubt he called his fellows and together they carried off Claudius to the camp. I believe it is true that he was frightened, and no wonder. He did not know

what they meant to do with him, nor does he now. I have been to the camp to-night and I have seen him. They let me in because I said I was taking him some books, which was true, and they thought this very funny. They think he's a harmless old eccentric; they make a pet of him, but no one can say what they will think to-morrow. The Senate has sent representatives to Claudius asking him to come at once and consult with them, but how can he? He is in the Praetorians' hands and they have not yet decided what to do.'

'What are the Senate doing?' asked Lollia. 'Is it true that they've been sitting ever since this afternoon? Don't they know their own minds?'

'No,' replied Pericles, 'they don't. They have been debating all day and still they are no nearer to knowing what they want. Some of them would not believe at first that Gaius was dead; they thought he was pretending in order to find out what the Senators were really thinking about him. Now some think that one of their own number should be the next Caesar, but they can't agree on which one. Some favour restoring the Republic but don't know how to do it. Others say that the armies on the frontiers and their generals ought to be consulted; what is the use they say, of restoring the old Republic unless we know that the generals will accept it and not start civil war?'

'This can't last,' said Lucius. 'If the Senate don't act, the soldiers surely will.'

'The Senate say they want liberty,' Pericles replied, 'or at least some of them do, but they've lived so long without it that now they can't strike a blow for it. They can't even pass a resolution for it. I think they're really waiting to be told by someone armed with force that they can no longer have it. The army doesn't want liberty. The people doesn't want liberty. Nobody wants liberty.'

'Oh, yes,' said Lollia. 'Uncle Claudius wants liberty, but he'll be the last to get it, because either they'll kill him or they'll make him Caesar.'

Pericles concluded — 'You'll see to-morrow. The army's master now and makes and unmakes Caesars.'

Pericles came again in the morning. The Senate were still sitting, he said, and the confusion of voices was no less. There

were wild rumours that the army in Syria was in revolt, that the army in Spain was marching on Italy, that the army on the German frontier had proclaimed its general Emperor — all these alarms, said Lucius, springing from the likelihood, which was real enough, that such things would happen. But, added Pericles, the Roman populace was busy. Crowds were marching up and down the streets abusing Gaius. They were making for every spot where a statue of him had been erected and were pulling it down, dashing it into fragments and crying that they wished it were the body of Gaius himself.

‘They deserve the worst they get.’ It was Caecilia speaking, severe as ever against Rome. ‘They pull down Sejanus to set up Gaius; and now they destroy Gaius in order to set up — whom?’

‘A great crowd has gathered at the Senate-house,’ said Pericles. ‘They’re hooting the Senate and demanding a new Caesar. Some of them are shouting for my patron Claudius.’

Lucius smiled. ‘That would be a rare joke. The butt of his own family, the despised scholar, the weakling whom the divine Augustus tried to conceal from the public eye — Claudius as Caesar!’

‘The people have always had a liking for him,’ said Metella.

‘And so have the Knights,’ added Lollia, ‘though that may have been to spite the Senate and show their independence of the Emperor.’

Pericles was thoughtful. ‘My patron is no fool, I can assure you. I’m not sure that sometimes in the past he hasn’t deliberately pretended to be stupid. Augustus and Livia fixed that reputation upon him from the first and I think he found it safer to act up to it. If he had shown capacity, he would not be alive to-day. Now I am off to the camp to see what I can discover. I’ll be back soon.’

In two hours he was back, panting with excitement. ‘Come to the Senate-house,’ he said. ‘There is just time to see him. I’ve come straight from the camp. In a few minutes Claudius will be setting out for the Senate, escorted by the Praetorian Guard. They have hailed him by acclamation as Emperor and Emperor, and now they are taking him to the Senate to get their act confirmed. As it will be!’ added Pericles grimly. As they hurried

along he told them what he had discovered. The Praetorian officers had debated long what choice they should make. No word had come of any decision by the Senate, which inclined them the more to insist on their own choice; if the Senators did not know their own mind, why care what their mind was? Then it was reported that the men were demanding a Caesar; they wanted someone chosen by the soldiers, who would value the soldiers, who would reward the soldiers. They thought that Claudius was such a man. Then also some intimate friends of Claudius were admitted into the camp to see him. When they told him the way things were looking, he was frightened; he did not want power, he said; he wanted to finish something he was writing. But when they told him that if he were not Emperor he was unlikely to be anybody for much longer because he would not be alive, he inquired whether the Praetorians and their officers were fixed on the project and, if so, how much money he should give them in order to confirm their loyalty. This was soon settled and his generosity was made known. Then he was brought out and presented by the officers to the rough but kindly and hilarious throng of soldiers. Pericles said that he stood very still, that he was dignified — for his physical defects did not show when he was standing and not speaking — and that he impressed everyone by his calmness.

They arrived at the Senate-house just in time to see Claudius arriving in his litter. The crowd, which had already heard the news, shouted with delight when it saw him. A formidable force of Praetorians, under their officers, preceded and followed the litter. The picked troops of the army, they preserved the sternest discipline. They formed a bodyguard round Claudius, escorted him to the door of the Senate-house, and forced the crowd well back. Claudius, now walking and excited by all that had befallen him, shambled along with faltering legs and shaking head, but he was smiling back at the crowd and waved to them as he disappeared through the door. When he came out again, the submissive Senate having heaped honours and titles on him, he stood for a moment contemplating the citizens who frantically cheered their new Emperor, Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. High officials who were around him said that, as he stood there watching the same enthusiasm as had greeted his

just murdered predecessor, a sudden guffaw was heard above the din. They were not certain whence it came; some thought from the gods, others from Claudius.

CHAPTER X

AND now Rome breathed again. Now the people could be happy. In Gaius youth, as in Tiberius age, had failed them. Age had been harsh, vindictive, pitiless. Youth they had found frivolous, cruel and demented. But now all would be well. What Rome needed, they felt, was experience, mature but not soured. Their new ruler was fifty years old, and fifty years was clearly an ideal age. Claudius had been through a hard school. He had been neglected, despised and insulted. He knew uncertainty too well to be arrogant; he had had to tremble for his own life so much that he must needs himself be merciful. Besides, he was contemplative; he was a scholar; he was devoted to books, so that he should be harmless. More than that, he had himself written books, he was an historian. He had written more than forty volumes, they told one another, about the history of Rome, twenty about the Etruscans, eight about Carthage. From whom could such fair accomplishment be hoped as from an historian who had brooded on the fortunes of Romans, Etruscans, Carthaginians? If he possessed the deep wisdom to pronounce on the conduct of these great peoples throughout the centuries, judging them to have done this thing well and that thing ill, had he not only to apply the same wisdom to the principal affairs of Rome in his own day and all would, nay must, go well? The Romans felt that ruled by such a man they did not need the glittering insincerities of a revived Republic. Hail to the kindly, experienced Claudius, in whom a weakly body was happily united to a philosophic mind! O happy Rome, they said, instantly making plans to set up statues of Claudius on the sites where they had just hacked down the images of Gaius. The Court poets wrote that the Golden Age had come.

On the day after Claudius had been proclaimed Pericles came

with news. He had traced the letter written by Metella which Thyrsus had sent to the Emperor's personal secretary. Pericles had failed to secure it. The secretary said he had no doubt that there was an adequate explanation; nevertheless, the letter had been formally sent in, there was no telling how many people knew that it was in his possession, and therefore he could not take the responsibility, or the risk, of allowing it to pass out of his hands. Claudius might be as generous as Pericles said he was, but the secretary had still to learn, he said, how the new Emperor regarded the disappearance of letters which might concern his personal safety. He must, therefore, bring Metella's letter before Claudius, which would give Pericles an admirable opportunity to show what influence he had with Caesar.

A few days later Pericles came to tell Lucius and Metella that they must come to the Palatine Hill next morning to be received by Claudius. He had no idea what the Emperor wanted to say to them, but Claudius had received Metella's letter from the secretary, had read it carefully and had questioned Pericles about Metella and her marriage to Lucius. Then he had read the letter again. Most imprudent! he had said. 'If I had done that sort of thing I shouldn't be alive to-day.' He then sent Pericles to bring Lucius and Metella to see him. 'Better not lose time,' he said, 'when once I really start on State affairs I shan't have a moment I can call my own.'

When next day Lucius and Metella, accompanied by Iris and a male slave, reached the Palace, they were taken to a room where they were asked to wait till Pericles came for them. As they glanced round a tall man rose from a chair to meet them. He had a long black beard and was wearing a dark blue tunic and white cloak; hanging from his neck by a chain was a little gold lion standing on golden bars. He pleasantly saluted Lucius and Metella.

'Parmenio!' said Lucius.

'Parmenio?' repeated Metella. 'So it is. Then let me thank you for the help you gave my husband and Pericles during that riot in Alexandria. I think they owed their lives to you.'

'I owed much,' replied Parmenio with a charming smile, 'to your father, with whom I had had a misunderstanding which was happily short-lived. I miss him greatly.'

‘What brings you to Rome again?’ asked Lucius. ‘You’re not going to tell us that you are the chief priest of Apollo’s temple in Rome?’

‘Not yet, but I am the second priest, his chief assistant. He is an old man and the time approaches when, since he does not die, he must retire. That is why I am here. I have come to seek support from Pericles, as I would have come to Publius Antonius had my dear friend been alive. Pericles knows my qualifications. I want him to persuade the Emperor to speak to those who control the appointments to the temple. He has only to say the word and — he used a slangy phrase — “the trick is done”: the chief priest will retire, I shall take his place, and a new energy will inspire the worship of Apollo in Rome. I hope to persuade the Emperor to pay a visit in person to the temple and to consult the god. I shall rely on Pericles to tell me what the Emperor is thinking, and I am convinced that the god will utter an oracle so apt that the Emperor will be delighted and the temple will become famous throughout the world.’ He regarded them pensively. ‘The management of the oracle,’ he said, ‘is always the most delicate part of the machinery of worship. It demands tact, knowledge of the human mind and, as I am speaking among friends, audacity. My venerable chief, who in all other respects has made the temple financially successful, and has himself made a little fortune out of it, is not at his best in conducting the oracle. He cannot remember that there is nothing, however fantastic, that men and women will not believe if they already wish to hear it. The whole problem’ — he spoke with great sincerity — ‘is to know what they wish.’

Pericles arrived to conduct them to the Emperor. They found Claudius sitting on a stool at a table strewn with papers. Without glancing at them he continued to shuffle the papers about, hunting among them with growing irritation for what he could not find. He spoke to Pericles petulantly — ‘You haven’t given me those particulars about the African elephant in comparison with the Asiatic. I know I asked you for them. I can’t finish the chapter without them, and soon I shall have no time left for writing. It’s very tiresome.’

Pericles stepped forward, looked round, picked up some books and found under them the missing notes. ‘Here they are,’ he

said. 'Everything you asked for — height, weight, dimensions of ears, length of trunk, average amount of food and drink, hours of sleep and all the rest.'

Claudius was delighted. 'Now I can get on,' he said. 'I'll do this chapter to-day whatever happens. I'll put off those princes from Bithynia; they can see me some other day. I'll start at once.' Pericles whispered to him and he turned almost gleefully to Lucius and Metella. 'You see how useful my good freedman is, but soon I'm going to be so busy that I shan't be able to write books any longer.' Then he told Pericles that he need not wait, so Pericles went away to talk to Parmenio.

Claudius told Lucius and Metella to sit down. 'I have heard all about your enemy Aulus,' he said. 'I do not feel sorry for him. Apparently he knew for long enough about his murderous freedman and was only going to expose him when he found that the letter about Gaius was to be used against its author.' Walking to another table, Claudius came back with a letter in his hand. Metella saw that it was hers. 'Now if this had ever reached my nephew Gaius, nothing could have saved you, your husband and your children. My dear' — he addressed Metella — 'never put in writing the opinion that Caesar is cowardly or servile. It may be true, but he won't like it, and the truer it is the angrier he will be. Besides, you should be charitable: I myself have been all that in trying to save my own life. So don't keep love-letters of this kind if your husband — or, of course, anyone else — writes them to you, and don't write peppering letters yourself unless you're sure that your husband will first receive them safely and afterwards destroy them. And now I have a present for you.' He tore Metella's letter in pieces and handed them to her. Then he spoke to Lucius — 'Your father-in-law's slave, Pericles, now my freedman, has been most useful to me. His conversation is subtle, his knowledge exquisite, his love of letters stimulating. But soon he will be wasting his time with me. I shall have no leisure for study or writing to please myself. I could put him in charge of my library, but he deserves a more varied life than that and I know where his affection lies. I am, therefore, going to transfer him to you, Lucius Paetus, for I know that he will be delighted to help you and your wife.'

They thanked him warmly. Metella said she thought it a great

shame that he should be deprived of the writing which he loved so much just because State business was so heavy.

'Ah!' said Claudius, 'but don't be so hasty. When you know what the State business is soon going to be, you will not be so scornful.' He was pleased. 'You can't guess.'

'I can,' said Metella. 'You're going to conquer Britain.'

'Well!' said Claudius. 'I like that! And who told you, madam, what is unknown except to Caesar himself and his most intimate advisers?'

'No one told me,' replied Metella. 'I make bold to use my wits, which tell me that Claudius Caesar will invade Britain as soon as possible.'

'A most wise lady!' said Claudius, chuckling. 'And is her husband as wise? Perhaps you can tell me, Lucius Paetus, why Caesar will conquer Britain?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Lucius, 'I can if you will forgive me for being frank.'

'Go on.'

'Caesar has so far been a student,' said Lucius, 'a man of letters, an historian, respected for his learning and his style' — Claudius nodded — 'and for all this he is admired by the Roman people. But the Romans are a military people, conquerors in war. They desire their Caesars to be generals, as all the Caesars have been except your nephew Gaius, and even he went north with the idea of winning glory on the battlefields of Britain. If Caesar should now conquer Britain, he will confirm his hold on all those, whether in Italy or in the provinces, who think about their Emperor in terms of military success.'

'Very well expressed!' said Claudius. 'That is what my advisers say, and they are right. Personally, I would much sooner write a book than win a battle. You can't win a battle single-handed. But I must do my duty to the State. Now I'll tell you what I think will happen. The best of our generals will be sent to Britain with an army. He will do fairly well but not well enough. Reports will arrive that his progress is slow, he is being held up by the natives, he lacks the touch of genius, he is bringing doubt on the Roman name. Who now, and who alone, can retrieve such a deplorable situation?'

'Caesar!' said Metella.

'Caesar!' echoed Claudius, 'and Rome will soon be told that Caesar is on the way to Britain, is there, has conquered and is coming back in triumph to a grateful people. You wouldn't have thought, would you, that a youth whose upbringing was entrusted, like mine, by his contemptuous relatives to a barbarous muleteer would live to be a triumphant general? I shall enjoy it.'

'Claudius Caesar,' said Metella boldly, 'can be a triumphant general just as much as any other Caesar, that is if it is intellect that counts.'

'I entirely agree with you, my dear,' said Claudius. 'And, when the day comes, I intend to provide you with an eye-witness of my campaign. I shall take your husband to Britain as a member of my staff. He will help Caesar to win his victories.'

'I'd like to go there myself,' said Metella.

'Ha!' said Claudius. 'You would, would you? No indeed! My generals, instead of killing Britons, would be fighting over you. You might even distract the military genius of Caesar himself.' He smiled in a sly way. 'Now good-bye, I must get on with those elephants. Good-bye, Lucius Paetus. I congratulate you. I find your wife most intelligent.'

They returned to Pericles, whom they found saying in a firm voice to Parmenio — 'I will speak to my patron, but so far as I am concerned, money does not enter into it,' and Parmenio replied, 'Of course not, my dear Pericles. I know that money means nothing to you, and indeed I myself hold the same view of it. All I meant was that in these changing days I would like to think that you had money put away against possible misfortune; it would give me an easy mind. But for the present let us say no more about money, always a sordid subject.'

'Pericles,' said Metella, 'we are going to the Suburra to pick up the cousins and take them back home with us. Will you come? Lollia Claudia is going to join us at the house. After we've freed Iris we're going to have a little thanksgiving for our safety at the end of this long journey, for surely it is the end.'

'I will come with you to the Suburra,' said Pericles.

Parmenio took a step towards Metella and spoke deferentially. 'I hope that your mother, the lady Caecilia, is well. I would have liked to pay her my respects in person.'

'Thank you,' said Metella rather coldly, 'I will deliver your message.'

She did not suggest that Parmenio should go to the house, and presently he said to Pericles — 'I will walk a few steps towards the Suburra. There is another small personal matter that I want to mention to you.'

Lucius and Metella went to the Suburra, talked for a few minutes to the children and, setting out with Tullus and Norba, met Pericles and Parmenio coming towards them.

'Yes,' Pericles was saying with a slight smile, 'I shall certainly report that also to my patron. You can rely on me.'

Parmenio patted his arm affectionately. "'Report!'" he said, 'What a cold word! I shall hope to deserve something better. I attach great value to your approval, my dear Pericles. And I have the utmost admiration for your patron.'

They all walked slowly to the end of the street, turned and had in front of them the climb to the Esquiline. Suddenly they were aware of a shouting, fighting mob at the mouth of a side-street. One section was driving the other back towards and into a big, dark building at the corner of the street. Fists, sticks and stones were being freely used. Some of the defeated had already reached safety in the building, while others in the rear were fighting to keep the enemy off while their comrades escaped through the narrow door.

'Jews!' cried Parmenio joyfully. 'Driven into their own synagogue! Look at them tumbling down. Apollo be thanked!' He cheered on the assailants.

It seemed indeed as though the last of the Jews would be overwhelmed by numbers. But they had for leader a man of furious energy. He was a tall, bony man, with sharp face, long black hair, and flailing arms, who, not content with standing his ground, flung himself violently into the front ranks of the mob, hurled them about like ninepins and then in an instant was back again among his friends. They could not but admire him. Once he plunged forward with such impetus that, his opponents shrinking before him, he went down on his knees and for a second or two disappeared.

'He's down!' cried Pericles, almost in anguish. 'He's lost!'

'Yes,' said Parmenio, 'they've finished him.' He rubbed his hands.

But the man was up again, leaping out of the throng and turning again to renew the fight with a happy, exultant laugh and a rain of savage blows.

'Peter! Oh Peter!' Iris cried out in a low and urgent voice.

In the excitement no one thought the exclamation strange except Metella, who looked sharply at the girl. To Lucius it brought a revelation. 'Why, yes!' he cried. 'I know him. It's the man on the boat, four years ago, the man whom Pontius Pilate recognized, the follower of the rebel Jesus whom Pilate executed. Yes, of course; he said he was coming to Rome.'

Peter turned in the doorway and, shouting defiance, felled two of the attackers with sudden, huge blows from his fists. Then he jumped back, and the door was shut. The mob waited for a minute or two, challenging the Jews to come out, then drifted away.

'That man can fight,' Lucius sounded pleased.

'All the Jews can fight,' said Parmenio. 'They fight all strangers and they fight among themselves. They ought to be permanently expelled from Rome.'

Lucius was thoughtful. 'I'm puzzled,' he said. 'This Peter leads a new sect, the so-called Christians, between whom and the other Jews there is a bitter quarrel. Yet here he is using the synagogue.'

'The quarrel hasn't spread to Rome yet, Lucius Paetus. That's all it means. But it will spread, you'll see.' Parmenio was indignant. 'What I say is that these Jews, whether new or old, should be banished for ever from our Rome. They can have their religion in their own little hole in Judaea, but we don't want it here in Rome. Every man, woman and child of them should be expelled from Italy and confined to Judaea; then we shall hear no more of their superstitions and the gods of Rome and Greece will reign supreme.'

'I could believe you,' said Lucius pleasantly, 'if it were not that you predicted with equal confidence that Sejanus would be Emperor.'

'Now, my dear sir,' protested Parmenio, 'you are unreasonable. You forget that in those days I had clients whose interests I was in honour bound to serve. Now I am independent.'

'Forgive me,' said Lucius. 'I thought that perhaps the interests

of Apollo — and his priests — came into it. But what matters to Rome is that Caesar should be supreme. This new sect talks of a kingdom that is to supersede the Roman power. It will have to be suppressed.'

'As a faithful servant of Rome I am entirely with you, Lucius Paetus,' said Parmenio. 'And now I must be getting back to duty. He turned to Metella — 'It has been a great pleasure to meet you in Rome and I hope that soon I may be able to welcome you at Apollo's temple in my capacity as its chief.' He strode away, waving his hand gaily.

The door of the synagogue opened. Peter came out. Putting his hands on his hips he looked up and down the street. When he saw that it was empty, he smiled broadly, derisive without bitterness, cheerily confident. He saw the little group watching him, noticed Iris and came across the street to speak to her. He greeted her as 'Judith', speaking in Aramaic. She replied to him in the same tongue. She said something about her master and mistress, and presently Peter turned and gravely saluted them.

Lucius tried him in the Greek tongue which was spoken almost everywhere in the civilized world. 'You are not popular?' he said.

Peter seemed rather to enjoy the idea. 'But we are tough. They'll have to get used to us!'

'Were they attacking you because you are Jews or because of this new faith?'

'Ah, you know of that already?' cried Peter, greatly excited. 'It grows, it spreads. It has come to Rome. Nothing can stop it now. The good news has come to Rome.'

'You haven't answered my question. Were they attacking you as Jews or as the followers of this Jesus?'

'As Jews,' said Peter. He laughed outright. 'This is the second battle to-day. You missed the first. We Christians have been using this synagogue. Why should we not? We are as good Jews as the others even if they reject our leader Jesus. What right have they to try to drive us out?' He was working himself into a passion. Then, seeing that his hearers were smiling at him, he calmed himself. 'To-day they collected in the synagogue, set on our brethren without warning and drove them into the street. I came up at that moment and we fought our way back. We gave

them a fine tousling. Then we drove them out in turn and followed them into the street. We should soon have scattered them to pieces, but the scum of Rome, who had been pleased to see us fight, began to cry, "Down with the Jews!" and attacked us. We united against them, but they were too strong for us. Most of our Jewish enemies have now left the synagogue by the back door, but we, the Christians, have come out by the front.' He pointed to a group who were standing in front of the door waiting for him.

'So,' said Lucius, 'you expect to spread your faith in Rome? And then?'

'Over the whole world! Not by the sword, though I would use it if need were, but by the word of the Christ Jesus, whom Pilate crucified. Nothing can stop us now we have come to Rome.' There was a gay delight of battle in his eyes.

'You would conquer Rome?' asked Lucius.

'But only to build something greater than Rome — the kingdom of my Master, who returning to this earth will reign supreme.' His voice rose exultantly as he turned now towards the Romans and now towards his followers. 'Yes,' he said, 'in that day we shall destroy all that is evil in Rome and every other city. There will be no more princes because the Christ will rule. There will be no more armies because with a word, with a lifting of his finger, the Christ will bring his enemies low. There will be no masters and slaves, for all men will be free and all men will be equal. There will be no rich or poor, for all will share alike.' His voice rose threateningly. 'Ah, and there will be no priests among us Christians, no greedy priests living in magnificent mansions on rich fees, in purple and fine linen. There will be none but equal men and women who love their neighbours as themselves, and walk humbly with their God.'

'And you think,' said Lucius coolly, 'that when your faith has conquered the world, it will remain like that — without rich and poor, without arrogant priests, without power and wealth and pride?'

'Yes,' said Peter. 'It will be so. It must be so. All who believe in Jesus the Christ, and the whole world will believe, will be as I have said, for were they otherwise they could not believe in him.'

He raised his hand solemnly. Lucius noticed that a large piece

of flesh had been taken clean out of the middle of one finger. The wound, deep to the bone, was newly healed.

Lucius pointed. 'More enemies?' he asked. 'They got you that time!'

Peter gave a splendid, jovial laugh. 'No, a friend!' he said. 'A faithful, hard-working friend! A mule. He wanted to go one way and I wanted him to go another. We had some argument.'

'He took a nice slice out of you!'

'He went my way!' Peter, with a happy, parting nod, stepped back and joined his followers. Lucius, watching him go, said thoughtfully, 'The man is like a torrent that at first sweeps all before it and then is lost in a shallow stream that flows idly on or is scattered into marshes or disappears in sand.'

'There are torrents,' said Pericles, 'which become majestic rivers that control the lives of men.'

'Like the Jordan,' said Iris hopefully.

Lucius smiled at her and moved on with Pericles. 'What was that smooth knave Parmenio saying to you when you joined us? He wasn't at the Apollo business again, was he?'

'No, sir. Something quite different. He was giving me his views about the future of Rome. He says that Rome, in order to secure herself against her enemies, will be compelled to make more and more use of good men from the provinces.'

'Of whom he is one?'

'Precisely, and in particular he says that Caesar will have to introduce provincials into the Roman Senate. He must bring fresh blood, Parmenio says, into the State counsels — the blood of educated, enterprising, bold provincials.'

'And you are to suggest to Claudius Caesar that you know of one such paragon?'

'That was the idea, Lucius Paetus.'

'And was there any idea this time, Pericles, of his ensuring you financially against the risks of age?'

'No, this time I was to act, he said from a sense of public duty. I must realize the urgent need to strengthen Rome against her weaknesses.'

'You mark my words,' said Lucius, 'some day Parmenio will be Consul.'

When they arrived at the house on the Esquiline, Lucius took

Iris with him to a magistrate and went through the formal procedure of making her free. After they had returned and Iris had been affectionately greeted, they all worshipped the Lares and Penates, the household gods, giving thanks on this solemn occasion for the home. They brought out the little images of the gods, set them upon a table, crowned them with garlands and offered incense and libations of wine. Young Publius stood by his father; Metella held the baby Antonia in her arms. Lollia Claudia announced that she had a health to propose. It was to the long life and happiness of Lucius Paetus and Metella. "Ten years ago," she said, "when they were betrothed I prophesied that nothing would defeat them, that those who stood so firmly together in love and faith would come through victorious in the end. And it is so, thanks to their own brave spirit and to the gods who willed it so."

They drank to Lucius and Metella, who thanked them all — Caecilia and Lollia, Pericles and Iris, Tullus and Norba — for the loving help that they had given during the ten years.

"Now, Pericles," said Lollia briskly, "it's time you told us what those poets of yours have to say about our friends whose health we have just drunk. It's ages since I've heard one of your comforting quotations. I want to feel learned again. I'm a barbarian now, just as I was before I came under your exquisite influence. Give us something good about the return of Lucius and Metella to home and quietude. From my dear Horace, isn't it?"

"No, madam, from Catullus. The words were almost written for the occasion. Then Pericles declaimed —

'Ah, what more happy than to put cares aside, when the mind lays down its burden, and wearied with travel's toils we come to our own home and rest on the longed for couch.'

"The poem, madam, actually spoke of foreign travel, but we may apply it equally, I think, to toil in our own land."

"It sounds all right to me," said Lollia. "You approve, Lucius?"

"Yes, indeed. What more can a man ask than to rest in his own home, among his family and his friends, with his mind at last released from cares?" He leaned forward and gently kissed Metella. Young Publius threw his arms about her. The baby Antonia in great glee drummed with her fists.

'If only,' said Lollia, 'my kinsman Claudius will go on as well as he has begun! Pericles, you know him well. What is he like? What will he do? What moves him most? Love of books, love of power, love of Rome?'

Pericles shook his head. 'For many more years than Gaius Caesar he lived in dread that he might be imprisoned, banished, killed. Those who play upon his fears will rule him: some of his freedmen, some of his women, for he depends too much on both. But so long as he has the army with him he should be safe.'

'The army?' said Tullus. 'I had a letter to-day from an old friend of mine who is with the troops in Spain. He says that when they heard of the murder of Gaius Caesar they wanted to declare their general Emperor. When they were told that the legions in Germany would support their own commander, they talked of marching north to fight it out. My friend says we can make up our minds that something of that sort is coming before long. He says the armies won't stand another Gaius, and that they're getting ready to fight each for its own leader.'

'That means civil war again,' said Lucius. 'I only hope it won't happen at the same time as our friend Peter is turning Rome upside down.'

Lollia looked up. 'Who's Peter? I never heard of him.'

'Peter's a Jew from Judaea, a strange and dangerous man, who would destroy Rome and set up the kingdom of his leader Jesus, a rebel whom Pilate crucified.'

'Why not crucify Peter, then?' said Lollia. 'That would settle him.'

Iris spoke up indignantly. 'Peter has done no harm,' she said. 'Peter is good. He only wants everyone to believe in the Master.'

They were puzzled. Then Lollia laughed. 'I thought she meant you, Lucius. She means Peter's master, this rebel Jesus.'

'Iris,' said Metella, not speaking in her usually kind voice, 'do you listen to this Peter? Do you go to his meetings?'

Iris stood still, but Young Publius, feeling that something was wrong and that Iris was being blamed, broke out in shrill protest. 'Peter is nice. I like Peter. He's nice.'

'Iris,' said Lucius, his voice stern, 'have you been taking Publius with you when you went to listen to this man?'

Before Iris could speak Lollia clapped her hands. 'Don't be

so gloomy, you two. There's no harm in it. If Young Publius goes to Peter's meetings they will only be an entertainment to him at his age. Send him to Peter and he'll end by preferring Apollo. Force him to go to Apollo and he'll run away to Peter. Give him leave to use his own mind, when he's got one, and hope for the best. You can't do more. Now it's my turn. I'll give you a real surprise. I've had a letter from my steward at Surrentum. It's about Vesuvius. Do you know there's steam and smoke and sulphur fumes coming out of the mountain side? He says that even at Surrentum he can see the smoke and smell the sulphur.'

'Has anyone been killed?' asked Metella.

'Oh, bless me, no,' replied Lollia. 'No one takes the mountain seriously when it's been dead all these years. They're making up picnic parties to climb it. The great game is to see who can go nearest to the cracks without sneezing. My steward's been quite close. He made a bet that he would collect some of the smoke and sulphur in a bottle. He won, and he's keeping the bottle for me to see. It's a great joke.'

'I should say it's a joke,' said Lucius. 'I wouldn't like to think, just when we're settling down to a cosy, secure life, that there was any need to worry about Vesuvius, or uncle Claudius's fears, or the legions' jealousies, or Peter the Christian's plans to destroy Rome. I don't believe in any of it.'

'Nor I,' said Metella. 'I don't and I won't. Let's talk of something else. We're making a fresh start. We've nothing to fear. Let's be happy together.'

They all began to chatter and laugh, a little too loudly, insisting on their confidence.

Lucius placed his arm protectively round the shoulders of Young Publius. Metella held Antonia more closely to her breast.

BIOGRAPHICAL POSTSCRIPT

by

MARY GROZIER

My father had been at work on *The Fates Are Laughing* for nearly three years before his death at the age of sixty-four, on April 16th, 1944. He had finished the writing some months earlier, and on the night before he died had completed the correcting of the typescript. His work as editor of the *Manchester Guardian* left him little time, and one would have thought little energy, for the writing of this novel of Roman life. Yet it was typical of the man, for his mental vigour and freshness seemed even to increase in the last years of his life when his physical health was failing. The son of a Nonconformist minister, he grew up in those traditions of austerity and simplicity which never left him. His classical education at the Manchester Grammar School, his years as a scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, fostered in him that intense and living interest in the life of Greece and Rome which culminated in the writing of this book. He had joined the *Manchester Guardian* in 1903, a year after he came down from Oxford. From that time his life was devoted to the paper. The *Manchester Guardian*, through all the forty years that he served on it, first under C. P. Scott and E. T. Scott, and then for twelve years as editor himself, was his passion and his pride.

Of his work for the paper it is not my business to speak here, save in so far as it showed those qualities of mind and character in which he was so consistent. They came both from himself and from his classical training. His liberalism, his love of truth and justice, his hatred of cruelty, were, I think, born in him. His Socratic scrupulousness in weighing the truth of a matter, his clarity of expression, and his passionate care for the writing of correct and lucid English, came from the inspiration, ever present in him, of the beautiful economy of the Greek, the brevity and discipline of the Latin, and the great cadences of the English Bible. He would suffer no ill-treatment of the English tongue. Every man has at his heart some guiding inspiration, some concept dear to him, that informs his thought and his words.

Greece, Rome and Palestine have shaped the civilization of Europe and its literature. W.P.C.'s busy life as an editor was concerned with the events of each day; his balanced judgment came from his viewing them always in the long perspective of history.

Greece, Rome and Palestine fascinated him; they were near to him, alive and vivid. Twenty years ago he had been researching into Christian origins, for the earliest beginnings of the Christian religion interested him profoundly. But so did the Roman background, and it was as a result of that work that he wrote *The Letters of Pontius Pilate* (1928), a series of imaginary letters from Pilate the Procurator to a friend in Rome, giving his view of affairs in Palestine, of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, and of the duties and difficulties of a Roman governor in Judaea. These letters are touched by that subtle irony which was a distinguishing characteristic of my father's speech and writing. His conversation did not overflow with wit and epigram, though he had a swift sense of humour. But his talk was always illuminated by those flashes of irony, grave and gay, which came to their full flower in *The Fates Are Laughing*.

When he took on the editorship of the *Manchester Guardian* in 1932, he laid aside his work on Christian origins, and had, I think, regretfully given up the idea of writing further. But the interest would not be suppressed, and again the direction that his imagination followed was that of the Roman life of the period. The story begins in A.D. 31, in the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, and passes through the reign of Caligula, to the accession of 'Uncle' Claudius, the supposedly weak-witted scholar whom the Praetorians made Emperor. As W.P.C. was busy with work for the newspaper all day at home, and again at the M.G. office till late at night, he wrote the book after he came home, between midnight and three o'clock in the morning. If it were suggested that this was too much exertion, he would reply, smiling gravely, that it was his only relaxation; and it was indeed to him a rest and a diversion from his constant preoccupation with the affairs of the paper. His intellectual energy was such that it was not surprising he should undertake this; what was astonishing was that his work on the book did not lessen by a shade his concentration on the conduct of the newspaper, nor did his long

hours of work and responsibility as a journalist detract from the freshness of invention and precise and subtle writing in the novel. The time spent on the one left him the more ready to turn to the other.

W.P.C.'s interest in the life and ways of Rome was enthusiastic; his scholarship anything but arid. The classical world lived as he spoke of it. In *The Fates Are Laughing* the Rome of the early Empire springs to life, with its arbitrary, inhuman emperors, its talkative senators, its rich knights, its fickle mob, and its gladiators, games and chariot races. And then the Empire: the legions away on the frontiers; the rich, crowded city of Alexandria, with Jews, Greeks and Egyptians ever ready for a fight; the city of Antioch, to which Pilate, who appears again in this book, is summoned to account for his tactless handling of the problems of Judaea. Paul is seen at Damascus; 'Peter the Christian' appears in Rome. In Rome and in the Latin countryside, and in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean, the Roman officials and their wives and families go about their business; the intrigues of an Emperor may shadow their lives, the exile of a senator may relieve their fears. And Publius, the old senator who would be an 'antique Roman', who longs for the good days of the Republic, chats with his Greek slave Pericles, a delightful character for whom one grows to feel as much affection as did Publius himself. The reconstruction of the Roman scene is effortless, for W.P.C.'s mind was so steeped in the period that his imagination worked freely and vividly in the telling of the story. He had always this gift of imaginative insight into the past. When we were children at home he made the 'wide-built streets of Troy' and Ulysses with his hair 'curled like a hyacinth-blossom' as familiar to us as the streets and people of the town around us. If he took us walking over a Roman road in the hills of Wales he could call up for us the marching legions, outposts of Rome in this wild western land. In the last few years of his life I remember often seeing him collect his papers in the afternoon and push a volume of Tacitus or Horace in with them to read on the tram as he went to work; perhaps as he passed through the grey streets of Manchester he was following his characters about the streets of Rome, or contemplating from the mainland the island of Capreae where the gloomy Tiberius lurked. Returning tired from editing

the paper, he would go purposefully to his study to work on the next chapter in his concise, supple and ironical prose. Had he known that death awaited him so soon, he would not, I think, have wished otherwise than to die as he did. He had worked at his desk in the *M.G.* office till only three days before, and at home *The Fates Are Laughing* lay completed.

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